

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 18

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 18

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About This Series

Welcome to Deep Research Sunday School Lessons, a meticulously researched collection of Sunday School lessons designed for thoughtful, transformative learning.

Our mission is simple: to return Sunday School to school, a place where deep conversations happen, where difficult questions are welcomed, and where faith and intellect work together.

Each volume is organized around a central biblical theme such as forgiveness, community, justice, anger, or character. Within that theme, you will find multiple lessons, each based on a specific Scripture passage and developed for three age groups.

A Note on Scripture Sources

These lessons draw primarily from the 66 books of the Protestant canon, using the New International Version (NIV) as our primary translation. Occasionally, lessons may reference the Deuterocanonical books (also called the Apocrypha), which are accepted as canonical by Catholic and Orthodox traditions and valued as historical literature by many Protestant scholars.

We include these texts sparingly but intentionally, because we believe they offer valuable historical and theological context for understanding the world of the Bible and the development of Jewish and Christian thought.

Whether or not the Deuterocanonical books are part of your personal faith tradition, we invite you to engage with them as literature that shaped the faith of millions and provides insight into the intertestamental period.

Above all, we believe that Christians should be inclusive of other Christians. The body of Christ is large, and our differences should draw us closer together in mutual respect, not push us apart in division.

How to Use This Book

For Teachers and Group Leaders

Each lesson in this volume is designed to stand alone, allowing you to teach them in any order that fits your curriculum or group needs.

The discussion questions provided at the end of each lesson are starting points, not scripts. Allow your group to explore tangents and raise their own questions as the Spirit leads.

For Individual Study

If you are using this book for personal devotion or self-directed study, we encourage you to take your time with each lesson, journaling your thoughts and prayers as you go.

For Families

These lessons can be adapted for family devotion time. Parents may wish to simplify certain concepts for younger children while using the discussion questions to engage older children and teens.

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*We pray that this volume blesses your study, enriches your teaching,
and draws you ever closer to the heart of God.*

The 1611 Press Team

Clean Slate

Complete Elimination, How do we completely get rid of what hurts relationships?

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

The Passage

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 (NIV)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Context

Peter writes to scattered Christian communities facing persecution and social hostility. These believers, mostly Gentile converts, struggle to maintain unity while under external pressure. The apostle has just reminded them of their new birth and calling to holiness, emphasizing their transformed identity as God's people. This passage comes at a pivotal transition, moving from individual transformation to

community health.

The immediate context shows Peter connecting two crucial elements: the love that flows from their rebirth (1:22-25) and the barriers that prevent that love from flourishing (2:1). The "therefore" in verse 1 creates a direct link, because you've been born again into love, you must actively remove what destroys love. Peter identifies five specific relational toxins that damage community bonds and prevent the sincere love he's just commanded.

The Big Idea

Active elimination of relational toxins is required before genuine love can flourish in Christian community.

This isn't about managing bad attitudes or reducing harmful behaviors, Peter demands complete riddance using comprehensive language ("all," "every kind"). The five toxins he names attack different aspects of relationship: malice targets the heart, deceit corrupts honesty, hypocrisy destroys authenticity, envy poisons contentment, and slander devastates reputation. Each one creates barriers to the deep, sincere love that should characterize reborn believers.

Theological Core

- **Active Removal.** The Greek word "rid yourselves" requires intentional action, not passive hoping, like taking off dirty clothes, elimination is deliberate and complete.
 - **Comprehensive Elimination.** Peter's language prevents partial cleanup, "all malice," "every kind" of slander, demanding total removal rather than mere reduction or management.
 - **Relational Focus.** All five toxins damage community bonds: malice toward others, deceit about self, hypocrisy in behavior, envy of others, slander against others.
 - **Love as Foundation.** The connection to chapter 1's call to love shows these eliminations aren't arbitrary rules but necessary preparations for authentic Christian community.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Complete elimination of relational toxins is required, not just reduction or management
 - Self-examination reveals specific areas where malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander operate in their lives
 - Active removal is an ongoing process requiring conscious choice and spiritual growth
 - Authentic love in community depends on clearing away what prevents genuine connection
-

Grades 4, 6

- Five specific attitudes hurt relationships: wanting to hurt others, lying, being fake, being jealous, and saying mean things
 - When these feelings come up, we can choose different actions than what our feelings want
 - Getting rid of these attitudes makes room for loving friendships and family relationships
 - Feeling angry or jealous is normal, but acting on those feelings in harmful ways hurts others and ourselves
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to get rid of mean thoughts and words
 - God helps us love each other better when we let go of mean feelings
 - We can choose kind words and actions instead of mean ones
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Perfectionism Trap.** Don't present elimination as achieved through willpower alone, acknowledge this is ongoing spiritual growth requiring God's help, community support, and patience with the process while maintaining the goal of complete removal.
-

- **Shallow Moralizing.** Avoid reducing this to behavior modification or rule-following, connect to the deeper purpose of authentic love in Christian community and the new birth that makes transformation possible.
- **Guilt Without Grace.** Don't let conviction become condemnation, frame self-examination as hopeful preparation for better relationships, emphasizing God's power to transform rather than personal failure.
- **Cultural Minimizing.** Resist the tendency to soften "complete elimination" to fit cultural acceptance of these behaviors, maintain Peter's comprehensive language while providing practical steps for growth.

Handling Hard Questions

"Is it realistic to completely eliminate these attitudes? Don't we all struggle with jealousy and meanness sometimes?"

You're right that complete elimination is challenging and ongoing. Peter isn't suggesting we achieve perfection overnight, but he is calling for a different approach than just "managing" these attitudes. Think of it like cleaning out a closet, you don't leave some trash in there because it's hard work. The goal remains total removal, but it happens through ongoing commitment, God's help, and community support. The key is seeing elimination as the target, not reduction as acceptable.

"What's the difference between feeling envious and being envious? Are all negative emotions sin?"

Great question. Peter is addressing patterns of behavior and attitude, not momentary feelings. Feeling a flash of envy when someone gets something you want is human, but nurturing that envy, feeding it, and letting it shape how you treat that person is what Peter calls for elimination. The difference is between temptation (which everyone faces) and cultivated attitudes that damage relationships. You can acknowledge a feeling without acting on it or letting it take root.

"How do you eliminate something like hypocrisy when we all fall short of our ideals sometimes?"

Hypocrisy isn't about falling short, it's about pretending to be something you're not. The difference is between weakness (admitting you struggle) and deception (pretending you don't). Peter is calling for authenticity: own your struggles, be honest about your growth areas, and stop performing righteousness you don't possess. Eliminating hypocrisy means embracing honesty about where you are while pursuing where God calls you to be.

The One Thing to Remember

Love grows in the space created by eliminating what destroys it, complete removal of relational toxins makes room for authentic Christian community to flourish.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to examine their own hearts for the five relational toxins Peter identifies, helping them wrestle with the difference between managing bad attitudes and completely eliminating them. Foster honest self-reflection about which toxins they harbor and how complete removal might transform their relationships.

The Tension to Frame

How do we completely eliminate attitudes and behaviors that feel natural and sometimes even justified? Can we really get rid of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander entirely, or is this an impossible standard?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with these attitudes, everyone struggles with envy, anger, or the temptation to be fake sometimes
 - Honor the complexity of complete elimination vs. ongoing spiritual growth, this isn't achieved through willpower alone
-

- Let them wrestle with what "complete removal" means practically rather than giving quick answers about spiritual disciplines
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: You're in a group project at school, and one person isn't doing their share of the work. You're getting frustrated watching them coast while you stress about grades. Then you overhear them telling someone else that you're being controlling and difficult to work with. Your initial annoyance turns into something sharper, now you want them to fail, you start looking for ways to make them look bad, and you find yourself trash-talking them to other classmates.

That progression from frustration to wanting revenge, from honest feelings to calculated meanness, that makes complete sense. When someone hurts us or treats us unfairly, our instinct is to protect ourselves and maybe hurt them back. It feels justified, even righteous sometimes. We tell ourselves they deserve what they get.

But here's what's interesting: somewhere in that progression, legitimate hurt turned into something that damages not just them, but you and your entire social circle. What started as normal human reaction became toxic to every relationship in the vicinity. And once those patterns get established, they become our default response to conflict.

Today we're looking at someone who understood exactly how these patterns develop and why they're so destructive. The apostle Peter wrote to early Christians who were facing much worse than group projects, persecution, social rejection, and real injustice. But instead of saying "fight back" or "protect yourselves," he gave them a radical challenge about eliminating the very attitudes that feel most natural when we're hurt.

Open your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 1. As you read, pay attention to how comprehensive his language is, this isn't about managing bad attitudes or reducing harmful behaviors. He's talking about complete removal.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly between students, helping with difficult words. Watch for early finishers and encourage them to re-read, looking for patterns. Let them feel the weight of words like "all" and

"every kind", this isn't casual advice.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific attitudes and behaviors does Peter name for elimination?
- Why might these five particular toxins be grouped together, what do they have in common?
- What words show Peter isn't talking about partial cleanup or better management?
- How does this connect to the love mentioned in the previous chapter, why would elimination be necessary?

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 (NIV)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read sections aloud. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the transitions between old life and new life.

Reader 1: Verses 1:22-23 (the foundation of love and new birth) **Reader 2:** Verses 1:24-25 (the permanence contrast) **Reader 3:** Verses 2:1-3 (the elimination command and growth goal)

Listen for the progression here, from love as the goal to elimination as the requirement to growth as the result. This is a strategic process, not random commands.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about Peter's approach here?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 questions about what you just read, but not questions you think you're supposed to ask. Ask about what you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Maybe something about the specific attitudes Peter names, or why complete elimination instead of just "try harder to be nice." Maybe about how this connects to loving people or being reborn. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the challenge of complete elimination.

Collecting Questions: Let me get your questions on the board first, then we'll dig into them. Don't worry about right or wrong questions, if you're curious about it, it's worth exploring.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "Where in this passage do you see evidence that Peter isn't talking about just 'being nicer' or 'trying harder'?"
 - "What do malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander have in common? Why might these five be grouped together?"
 - "How do these five attitudes specifically damage the kind of love Peter describes in chapter 1?"
 - "What's the difference between feeling envious and cultivating envy? Between a moment of anger and harboring malice?"
-

- "Why might complete elimination be necessary rather than just managing these attitudes better?"
- "How does 'being born again' connect to the possibility of getting rid of these patterns entirely?"
- "If someone eliminated all five of these from their life, how would their relationships change?"
- "What makes this different from just following rules about being good, why does Peter frame it as 'rid yourselves'?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Peter isn't giving random advice about being a better person. He's identifying specific barriers that prevent the authentic love he just commanded. Each of these five attitudes, wanting to hurt people, deceiving them, being fake with them, resenting what they have, and attacking their reputation, makes genuine connection impossible. Love grows in the space created by eliminating what destroys it. That's why partial cleanup isn't enough.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a moment. You all know what these attitudes feel like, the satisfaction of making someone who hurt you look stupid, the protection of hiding your real thoughts, the bitter sting of wanting what someone else has. Where do you see these five toxins showing up in your actual relationships?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Social media, posting things to make others jealous, subtly trashing people online, presenting a fake perfect version of yourself
 - Family dynamics, harboring grudges against siblings, being dishonest with parents to avoid consequences, bad-mouthing family to friends
 - Friendship drama, spreading information to damage someone's reputation, acting different with different friend groups, feeling bitter about others' social success
 - Academic competition, wanting others to fail so you look better, cheating or lying about grades, resenting others' achievements
 - Dating/crushes, manipulating situations to hurt romantic rivals, being deceptive about your intentions, talking badly about exes
-

- Team/club dynamics, being fake to fit in, undermining others to advance your position, harboring anger toward teammates
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Some situations are complex and call for discernment. Help them think through what complete elimination might look like practically rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone actually eliminate one of these patterns from their life? What changed about their relationships?"
 - "What would help you move from managing these attitudes to actually getting rid of them?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between justified anger and malice that needs elimination?"
 - "What's the difference between wisdom about people and harboring slander or resentment?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Peter isn't calling you to be perfect or to never feel frustrated, hurt, or disappointed with people. But he is challenging the assumption that harboring malice, being deceptive, acting fake, nurturing envy, and trashing people's reputations are just part of human relationships. Complete elimination is possible because you've been born again, you have access to a different way of being human.

This week, pay attention to which of these five shows up most naturally in your relationships. Don't try to fix everything at once, but notice the pattern. When you feel that familiar pull toward wanting to hurt someone, being deceptive, acting fake, nurturing resentment, or attacking someone's character, pause and ask what elimination might look like instead of management.

I'm impressed by the honesty and thoughtfulness you brought to this discussion today. Keep wrestling with hard questions about what authentic love requires. You're capable of the kind of relationships that flourish when these toxins are completely removed.

Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

Your Main Job Today

Help kids identify the five attitudes that hurt friendships and learn that they can choose different responses when these feelings arise. Focus on the possibility of getting rid of harmful patterns completely rather than just "being nicer."

If Kids Ask "What if someone really deserves to be treated meanly?"

Say: "I understand why you'd feel that way. Getting rid of meanness doesn't mean letting people hurt you. It means finding ways to protect yourself and solve problems without hurting others back, which actually works better."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been really jealous of something someone else had, maybe their clothes, their phone, their family vacation, or how good they are at sports. Keep your hands up... now keep them up if you've ever said something mean about that person when they weren't around. Okay, you can put your hands down.

Here's a harder situation: Someone in your class starts a rumor about you that makes you look bad. It's not even true, but people believe it and now they're treating you differently. Part of you wants to start an even worse rumor about them to get them back. Another part of you wants to find out who they care about and hurt those people. But another part knows that's not right, even though it would feel good.

Those feelings are totally normal, when someone hurts us, our brain immediately starts looking for ways to hurt them back or protect ourselves. Sometimes lying feels safer than telling the truth. Sometimes pretending to be someone different feels better than being ourselves. Sometimes talking badly about others makes us feel more important.

This is like what happens in movies when a character faces a choice between doing something that feels good in the moment and doing something that's actually good for everyone. Think about Elsa in Frozen when she's so afraid of her powers that she shuts everyone out and lies about who she is. Or Simba in

The Lion King when he runs away and pretends to be someone different because facing the truth feels too hard.

The tricky part is figuring out how to handle those strong feelings without hurting other people or ourselves. What do you do when being mean, lying, being fake, being jealous, or talking badly about someone feels like the best option in the moment?

Today we're going to hear about a time when the apostle Peter wrote to people who had really good reasons to be angry, jealous, and mean. But instead of saying "go ahead and hurt people back," he gave them a completely different strategy. Let's find out what he told them to do instead.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to the jealousy and meanness scenarios. Acknowledge their experiences briefly with "That makes sense" or "Most people feel that way sometimes" before moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a group of people who had every reason to be angry and bitter. These were Christians living in different cities across the Roman Empire, and life was not easy for them.

Their neighbors thought their faith was weird and dangerous. People wouldn't do business with them anymore. Some lost their jobs because they wouldn't participate in festivals honoring false gods. Kids made fun of their children at school. Former friends turned against them. Some were even thrown in prison for following Jesus.

Can you imagine how frustrating and scary that would be? When people treat you unfairly, especially when you haven't done anything wrong, your heart starts to fill up with anger. You want them to suffer the way you're suffering. You want to get back at them.

These Christians were starting to do exactly what you'd expect, they were getting mean with each other, lying to protect themselves, pretending to be different people depending on who they were with, getting jealous of Christians who weren't suffering as much, and talking badly about people who were causing them problems.

That's when the apostle Peter wrote them a letter. Peter knew all about making bad choices when he was scared or angry, he had denied even knowing Jesus when his own life was in danger. But Jesus had forgiven him and taught him a better way to live.

Peter started his letter by reminding them of something amazing: "You have been born again." He wasn't talking about physical birth, he was talking about how following Jesus gives you a completely new heart and new power to make different choices.

Then Peter told them something that probably surprised them. Instead of saying "fight back" or "protect yourselves by being meaner than they are," he said this:

1 Peter 2:1 (NIV)

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."

Peter named five specific things that needed to go away completely. Let me explain each one in words you know: Malice means wanting to hurt other people. Deceit means lying or being dishonest. Hypocrisy means being fake, acting like someone you're not. Envy means being jealous and bitter about what other people have. And slander means saying mean or false things about other people.

Notice that Peter didn't say "try to be a little nicer" or "manage your anger better." He said "rid yourselves", which means get rid of these things completely, like taking out the trash.

But here's what's really interesting: Peter said to get rid of "all" malice and slander of "every kind." He wasn't talking about just reducing these attitudes or being better at controlling them. He was talking about eliminating them entirely.

Now, you might be thinking "That's impossible! Everyone gets jealous sometimes. Everyone feels like being mean when someone hurts them." And you're right, these feelings are normal. But Peter was saying that just because feelings are normal doesn't mean we have to act on them or let them control us.

Peter explained why this matters so much: These five attitudes are like poison in relationships. When you harbor malice, really wanting to hurt someone, it becomes impossible to love them. When you're being deceptive, people can't trust you. When you're being fake, no one gets to know the real you. When you're eaten up with envy, you can't celebrate good things that happen to others. When you're constantly saying mean things about people, you destroy their reputation and your own.

But when you completely get rid of these five toxic attitudes, something beautiful happens. You have room in your heart for the kind of love that makes real friendships possible. You become someone

people can trust. You become authentic and genuine. You become able to celebrate others' success. You become someone whose words build people up instead of tearing them down.

Peter told those early Christians that they had the power to choose differently because they'd been born again, they had Jesus's power inside them to break old patterns and create new ones.

This doesn't mean you'll never feel angry, jealous, or hurt. It means that when those feelings come up, you can choose responses that don't damage your relationships or poison your own heart.

The Christians who received Peter's letter discovered that he was right. When they stopped trying to manage meanness and instead got rid of it completely, their relationships with each other became strong enough to survive persecution. They became known for their love instead of their bitterness.

Sometimes in our lives, we face smaller versions of the same choice, when someone hurts us or treats us unfairly, we can choose to harbor grudges and plan revenge, or we can choose to get rid of those toxic attitudes completely.

What we learn from Peter's letter is this: Getting rid of attitudes that hurt relationships makes room for the kind of love that creates amazing friendships and families. When malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander are completely gone, authentic love can grow.

God gives us the power to make these choices because we belong to Him now. We don't have to be controlled by our worst impulses, we can eliminate them and choose something better.

Pause here. Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Big Five

Let's make sure we understand the five attitudes Peter said to get rid of completely. If you had a friend who really wanted to hurt other people, lied about important things, acted totally fake depending on who they were with, got bitter and jealous about everything other people had, and constantly said mean things about everyone, would you want to hang out with them? Why would these five attitudes make friendship impossible?

Listen For: "They'd be mean to me too," "You couldn't trust them," "You wouldn't know who they really are", affirm: "Exactly! These attitudes poison every relationship they touch."

Question 2: The Feelings Question

Here's what might be confusing: Peter isn't saying you'll never feel angry when someone hurts you, or never feel a flash of jealousy when someone gets something cool. Those feelings are normal human reactions. But there's a difference between having a feeling and feeding that feeling until it becomes wanting to hurt people, being dishonest, acting fake, staying bitter, or attacking people with your words. What do you think is the difference between feeling something and becoming controlled by it?

If They Say: "You can choose what to do with feelings", respond "That's exactly right. Feelings happen, but you get to choose what to do next."

Question 3: The Complete Elimination Part

Peter didn't say "try to be a little less mean" or "manage your jealousy better." He said get rid of these attitudes completely. That sounds really hard, maybe even impossible. But think about it this way: if these attitudes poison relationships, why would you want to keep some poison around? What do you think would happen in your friendships and family if you completely eliminated wanting to hurt people, being dishonest, being fake, staying jealous, and saying mean things?

Connect: "This is exactly why Peter called for complete removal instead of just trying harder, love needs clean space to grow."

Question 4: The Power Question

Peter told those Christians they had the power to make these changes because they'd been "born again", they had God's power inside them to choose differently. But let's be honest: when someone really hurts you or embarrasses you, choosing kindness instead of revenge feels almost impossible sometimes. Where do you think the power comes from to choose love when everything in you wants to choose meanness?

If They Say: "God helps you" or "Prayer", affirm, but also add "And sometimes you need friends and family to remind you who you want to be when you're tempted to choose meanness."

You've identified something really important: these five attitudes make authentic relationships impossible, but getting rid of them completely creates space for real love and friendship to grow. That's why Peter called for total elimination instead of just better management.

4. Activity: Poison Clear-Out (8 minutes)

Zero Props Required , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

Purpose

This activity reinforces complete elimination by having kids physically experience the difference between trying to manage poison and getting rid of it entirely. Success looks like kids discovering that partial cleanup doesn't work, you need complete removal for relationships to be healthy.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do an activity called "Poison Clear-Out." I need everyone to spread out around the room and sit on the floor. You're going to pretend to be a friendship that's trying to grow, but there are five types of poison that keep hurting the friendship.

When I call out one of the five poisons, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander, you need to curl up in a ball and cover your head. That represents how these attitudes damage friendship. When I say "partial cleanup," you can sit up but stay sitting down. When I say "complete elimination," you can stand up and stretch your arms wide like you're welcoming a hug.

Here's the challenge: we're going to see what happens when you try to manage the poisons versus when you completely eliminate them. Pay attention to how it feels different in your body when you're curled up tight, sitting but restricted, or standing with arms wide open.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Peter was teaching, partial cleanup of these attitudes still leaves relationships restricted, but complete elimination makes authentic love possible.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let's start with all five poisons active: "Malice... deceit... hypocrisy... envy... slander!" Everyone curl up tight. This is what friendship looks like when these attitudes are present, no room to grow, no freedom to connect. How does this feel?

Now let's try partial cleanup: "Partial cleanup of malice and envy." Sit up but stay sitting down. You've managed some of the poison, but deceit, hypocrisy, and slander are still there. Notice that you still can't fully embrace each other, you're still restricted.

Let's try managing one more: "Partial cleanup of slander too." You can shift positions but still stay sitting. Better than before, but deceit and hypocrisy are still limiting what's possible. Pay attention to how your body still feels constrained.

Now complete elimination: "Complete elimination of all five poisons!" Stand up and stretch your arms wide like you're ready to give the biggest, most welcoming hug ever. This is what authentic love looks like when all the relationship toxins are gone.

Look around at each other now. See how everyone's posture is completely different? When you eliminate the poisons entirely, you have freedom to connect authentically. When you just manage them, you're still restricted.

Watch For: The moment when they move from sitting (partial cleanup) to standing with arms wide (complete elimination), this is the physical representation of how complete removal creates space for authentic love.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were curled up tight versus when you were standing with arms wide? The curled-up position represents what happens to friendship when malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander are present, there's no room for real connection. Even partial cleanup still left you restricted. Only complete elimination gave you the freedom to embrace each other fully. That's exactly what Peter was teaching about love and relationships.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to completely get rid of five attitudes that poison relationships, wanting to hurt others, lying, being fake, staying jealous and bitter, and saying mean things about people. Peter didn't say "manage these better" or "try to be a little nicer." He said eliminate

them completely so that real love and friendship can grow.

This doesn't mean you'll never feel angry or jealous or hurt, those feelings are normal. But you can choose what to do with those feelings. You can choose responses that build relationships instead of destroying them.

The amazing result is that when these five poisons are completely gone, you become someone people can really trust and love. Your friendships become strong and authentic instead of fake and fragile. You become known for building people up instead of tearing them down.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you feel the urge to be mean, lie, act fake, stay jealous, or say something hurtful about someone, pause and ask yourself: "What would complete elimination look like right now?" Try choosing a response that builds the relationship instead of damaging it.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us how to have friendships that are real and strong. Help us get rid of the attitudes that hurt our relationships with others. When we feel like being mean or fake or jealous, help us choose love instead. Give us the power to eliminate what hurts and choose what helps. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to get rid of mean thoughts and words so we can love each other better.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
-

- **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare mean thoughts to muddy shoes, you take them off before going into a clean house. Ask "What happens when we get rid of our mean thoughts?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness and love. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: point to yourself during "love," hug yourself during "kind," and reach out to others during "Jesus loves" verses.

Great singing! I love how you used your whole body to show kindness. Now let's sit down in our story horseshoe because we're going to hear about a very important letter that teaches us how to love each other better.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

Formation: Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when talking about mean attitudes, sound happy when talking about God's love and kindness.

Today we're going to meet a man named Peter who wrote a very important letter to help people love each other better.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Peter knew about some people who were feeling very sad and angry. Other people were being mean to them just because they loved Jesus. That made them want to be mean back.

[Make a sad face and speak gently]

When people are mean to us, we sometimes get mean thoughts and want to say mean words back. Have you ever felt like that? It's normal to feel upset when someone hurts your feelings.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound hopeful]

But Peter had learned something very important from Jesus. He knew a better way to handle those upset feelings. So he wrote them a letter.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Peter told them something that might surprise you. He said, "Get rid of all mean thoughts and mean words. Get rid of lying. Get rid of being fake. Get rid of being jealous. Get rid of saying bad things about other people."

[Move to side, gesture like you're throwing things away]

Peter didn't say "try to be a little nicer." He said "get rid of" all the mean stuff, throw it away like trash!

1 Peter 2:1 (NIV)

"Get rid of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think those people were surprised? Peter was telling them to throw away ALL the mean thoughts, not just some of them. Yes, that is surprising!

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

But then Peter explained why this was so important. He said these mean attitudes are like poison that makes friendships sick.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When we keep mean thoughts about people, we can't really love them. When we lie, people can't trust us. When we're fake, people don't know the real us. When we're jealous, we can't be happy for others. When we say mean things, we hurt people's feelings.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Peter said, "Get rid of ALL of it so you can love each other the way God wants you to."

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what happened? When those people threw away their mean thoughts and words, they became known for being the most loving, kind people anyone had ever met!

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth Peter taught them is this: God gives us power to choose kindness instead of meanness. We don't have to keep mean thoughts, we can throw them away!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, other kids might be mean to us at school, or our brothers and sisters might make us mad, or we might feel jealous of what someone else has. When that happens, we can choose what to do with those feelings.

[Move closer to the children]

When you feel like being mean, you can choose to be kind instead. When you feel like lying, you can choose to tell the truth. When you feel jealous, you can choose to be happy for others. When you want to say something hurtful, you can choose words that help.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God helps us make these good choices because He loves us and wants our friendships to be strong and happy. When we get rid of the mean stuff, we have room in our hearts for love!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Formation: Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and spread out around the room. I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

Teacher Circulation: Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

Discussion Questions

Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.

1. What does it feel like when someone is mean to you?
2. When have you felt like being mean to someone else?
3. Why do you think Peter wanted people to get rid of ALL the mean thoughts?
4. What would you do if someone said something mean about you?
5. How does it feel different when someone is kind to you versus mean?
6. What does God want us to do when we feel mad?
7. What happened when those people threw away their mean thoughts?
8. How can we be kind at school when others are mean?
9. What can help us choose kind words instead of mean words?
10. When is it hard to choose kindness?
11. Why does God want us to get rid of mean thoughts?
12. How can we love our family better by choosing kind thoughts?
13. What does it mean to "throw away" mean thoughts like trash?
14. How does God help us choose kindness?
15. What good things happen when we choose to be kind?

16. When someone has something you want, how can you be happy for them?

17. What should we remember when we feel like being mean?

18. How can we pray when we're having mean thoughts?

19. What would happen if everyone got rid of their mean thoughts?

20. How can we help our friends choose kindness too?

Great discussions! Let's come back together and sit in straight lines for our closing song. Who wants to share what they talked about?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about choosing kindness or throwing away mean thoughts. Suggestions: "Throw Away Your Mean Thoughts" (make throwing motions), "Choose Love" (point to heart), or "God Helps Me Be Kind" (reach up to God, then hug yourself). Include movements: throwing motions during "throw away," pointing to heart during "love," and reaching up during "God helps."

Beautiful singing! I love how you showed throwing away mean thoughts with your movements. Now let's sit cross-legged in rows for prayer time. Remember to fold your hands and bow your heads.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

Formation: Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

Dear God, thank you for teaching us to get rid of mean thoughts and words...

[Pause]

Help us choose kind words when we feel like saying mean things. Help us throw away jealous thoughts and choose to be happy for others when good things happen to them...

[Pause]

Help us remember that You give us power to choose love instead of meanness. Thank You for loving us and helping us love others better...

[Pause]

Thank You for being so kind and patient with us. Help us be kind and patient with others too. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about getting rid of mean thoughts. Examples: "God, help me choose kind words" or "Thank you for helping me throw away jealous thoughts."

Remember this week that God helps you choose kind thoughts and words instead of mean ones. When you feel like being mean, you can ask God to help you choose love instead. Have a wonderful week choosing kindness!

Don't Let the Sun Set

Same-Day Resolution, When conflict drags on, does it get easier or harder to resolve?

Ephesians 4:17-32

Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

The Passage

Ephesians 4:17-32 (NIV)

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ, 21 if indeed you heard him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have

something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, resentment and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Context

Paul is writing to the Ephesian church about the radical transformation that should characterize Christian community. After establishing their identity in Christ (chapters 1-3), he turns to practical implications. This section comes in the middle of his instructions about living differently from the surrounding pagan culture. The Ephesians lived in a city known for magical practices, commerce, and moral confusion.

Immediately before this passage, Paul discussed unity in the body of Christ and spiritual gifts. Now he's getting specific about daily relationships within the Christian community. The commands here aren't abstract principles but concrete practices for people who must live, work, and worship together despite their differences and inevitable conflicts.

The Big Idea

Anger is a normal human emotion that becomes spiritually dangerous when we let it extend past nightfall, same-day resolution protects both our relationships and our spiritual vulnerability.

This isn't a command to never be angry or to suppress legitimate emotions. Paul acknowledges that anger happens ("in your anger") but creates a time boundary to prevent it from becoming entrenched bitterness. The sunset deadline forces us to address conflicts quickly rather than letting them fester into something much harder to resolve.

Theological Core

- **Anger without sin is possible.** Paul distinguishes between the emotion of anger and sinful actions that might flow from it. Anger at injustice or wrong can be righteous, but it requires careful boundaries.

- **Time boundaries prevent spiritual danger.** Extended anger creates opportunities for the devil to establish footholds in our lives and relationships. The sunset deadline isn't arbitrary, it's protective.

- **Same-day resolution builds community.** Quick conflict resolution prevents the buildup of bitterness that destroys relationships. It's a practice that protects both individual hearts and communal unity.

- **Emotional honesty requires wisdom.** Acknowledging anger is healthy, but allowing it to persist overnight transforms it into something more dangerous. We must feel our emotions fully while managing them wisely.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Anger held overnight creates spiritual vulnerability and gives the devil opportunities to work

- Same-day resolution requires wisdom, some conflicts need time for emotions to cool before productive conversation

- The goal isn't to eliminate anger but to process it quickly and constructively before it hardens into bitterness

- Discernment is needed to distinguish between righteous anger at injustice and interpersonal conflict anger

Grades 4, 6

- It's normal to feel angry sometimes, but keeping anger for a long time makes it grow bigger and meaner
- When we're mad at someone, we should try to work it out the same day instead of going to bed angry
- Holding onto anger hurts us and makes it harder to be friends again
- Sometimes we might feel like staying mad, but choosing to make up is better even when it's hard

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to make up with people before we go to sleep
- God helps us say sorry and forgive when we're mad
- We can tell God when we're angry and ask Him to help us feel better

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Dismissing all anger as sinful.** Paul clearly acknowledges that anger happens and can exist without sin. The issue isn't the emotion itself but how we handle it and how long we hold onto it.
- **Applying this rigidly without wisdom.** Some conflicts involve abuse, safety issues, or complex family dynamics where immediate resolution isn't safe or possible. The principle of quick resolution must be balanced with wisdom and safety.
- **Forcing superficial peace.** Same-day resolution doesn't mean sweeping problems under the rug or accepting "sorry" without addressing real issues. It means genuine work toward resolution, not pretending conflict doesn't exist.
- **Ignoring the spiritual warfare element.** Paul specifically mentions the devil gaining a foothold. This isn't just good relationship advice, it's spiritual protection. Extended anger creates opportunities for spiritual attack on individuals and communities.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if the other person won't resolve the conflict by bedtime?"

You're responsible for your own heart and actions, not theirs. You can release your anger to God, choose not to sin in your anger, and do what you can to pursue peace, even if the other person isn't ready. Sometimes your part is preparing your heart to be ready when they are, or deciding not to let their unwillingness control your emotional state.

"What about anger at injustice, shouldn't we stay angry about things like racism or abuse?"

There's a difference between righteous anger that motivates justice work and personal anger that becomes bitter resentment. Righteous anger can persist as long as injustice persists, but it should fuel constructive action rather than destructive emotion. The key is whether your anger is moving you toward God's heart for justice or toward personal bitterness and hatred.

"Isn't it sometimes better to wait until emotions cool down before trying to resolve conflict?"

Absolutely, same-day resolution doesn't mean hasty resolution. You might need a few hours to calm down before you can speak constructively. The goal is to work toward resolution before sleep, not to force premature conversation that makes things worse. Sometimes resolution is as simple as saying, "I'm too upset to talk well right now, but I want to work this out tomorrow morning."

The One Thing to Remember

Anger that sleeps over becomes much harder to resolve and gives the enemy opportunities to work in our hearts and relationships.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between Paul's clear instruction for same-day resolution and the reality that some conflicts are complex, dangerous, or involve parties who aren't ready to resolve. Help them discover wisdom about when and how to apply this principle.

The Tension to Frame

When conflict drags on, does it get easier or harder to resolve? Is same-day resolution always wise, always possible, or always safe?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with family conflict, friendship drama, and situations where quick resolution wasn't possible
 - Honor the complexity, some anger involves serious issues that can't be resolved in one conversation
 - Let them wrestle with applying this principle rather than giving them neat answers
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time you had a fight with someone in your family, maybe a sibling or parent. In the moment, you were genuinely angry. Maybe they were wrong, maybe they hurt your feelings, maybe they were being unfair. Your anger made perfect sense.

Now think about what happened next. Did you resolve it quickly, or did it drag on for days? If it dragged on, how did you feel toward that person the next morning? What about three days later? Most of us find that unresolved anger doesn't stay the same, it changes into something else.

Today we're looking at Paul writing to Christians in Ephesus about managing conflict in community. These people had to live together, work together, and worship together despite coming from completely different backgrounds. Conflict was inevitable. But Paul gives them a specific time limit for resolving anger.

As we read, pay attention to two things: first, notice that Paul doesn't say "never be angry", he acknowledges that anger happens. Second, notice the deadline he gives and think about why he might choose that specific time frame.

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4, and let's read silently starting at verse 17. We're going to read the whole section to see how anger fits into Paul's bigger picture of Christian community.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. Help with pronunciation of words like "sensuality" or "malice." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread verses 25-27. Let them sit with the weight of these very practical, specific instructions.

As You Read, Think About:

- What contrast is Paul drawing between their old life and new life in Christ?
- What specific behaviors does he mention, and why might these be problems in community?
- What's the connection between anger and giving the devil a foothold?
- How would you feel if someone tried to apply verse 26 to a conflict in your life?

Ephesians 4:17-32 (NIV)

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ, 21 if indeed you heard him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have

something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, resentment and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers but let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for verses 26-27 since those are the focal verses, you want them read with appropriate weight and clarity.

Reader 1: Verses 17-24 (the contrast between old and new life) **Reader 2:** Verses 25-28 (specific behaviors including anger) **Reader 3:** Verses 29-32 (speech and forgiveness)

As you listen, notice that Paul isn't giving abstract theology here, he's getting very specific about daily life in Christian community. These are people who have to actually live with each other.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups get started with "What surprised you most about these instructions?"

Get into groups of three or four with people near you. Your job is to come up with one or two real questions about what we just read, not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might start with "Why does Paul..." or "What if..." or "How do you..." You have three minutes starting now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the discussion with their questions. Your job is to facilitate deeper thinking, not to lecture. Guide them toward discovery rather than giving answers immediately.

Collecting Questions: Let me write your questions on the board and we'll dig into them together. Look for themes and connections between what different groups wondered about.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that Paul expects anger to happen in Christian community?"
 - "What's the difference between 'in your anger do not sin' and 'get rid of all anger' in verse 31?"
 - "What do you think Paul means by giving the devil a foothold? How does unresolved anger create spiritual danger?"
 - "When might the sunset deadline be wise, and when might it cause more problems?"
 - "How do you know when you're holding onto anger versus when you need time to process before resolving conflict?"
 - "What's the difference between quick resolution and superficial peace?"
 - "Can you think of situations where immediate resolution might not be safe or wise?"
 - "Why might Paul choose sunset as the deadline rather than, say, a week or a month?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul acknowledges that anger is a normal part of human relationships, he doesn't say "never be angry." But he also recognizes that anger has a shelf life. When it sits too long, it transforms into something more dangerous: bitterness, resentment, spiritual vulnerability. The sunset deadline forces quick resolution precisely because unresolved anger gets harder to resolve, not easier.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your actual lives. Where do you see this pattern playing out? Think about your family dynamics, friendship drama, school conflicts, even online disagreements. When have you experienced anger that got worse because it wasn't resolved quickly?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Sibling fights that drag on for days until parents force an apology
 - Friend groups where someone stays mad and makes everyone choose sides
 - Social media conflicts where people screenshot and share angry messages instead of resolving them
 - Family arguments where nobody wants to be the first to apologize
 - Situations where you're angry about genuine injustice or unfair treatment
 - Times when you're too hurt or emotional to have a productive conversation immediately
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to give solutions. Some situations are genuinely complex and don't have simple answers. Help them think through wisdom and discernment rather than applying rules mechanically.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen quick conflict resolution actually work well in your life?"
 - "What would help you follow through on resolving anger the same day rather than letting it build up?"
 - "How do you discern between anger that needs immediate attention and anger that needs processing time first?"
 - "What's the difference between righteous anger at injustice and personal anger that becomes destructive bitterness?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul isn't asking you to suppress your emotions or pretend anger doesn't happen. He's warning you that anger has an expiration date. When it sits overnight, it starts to change into something harder and more dangerous, for your heart, your relationships, and your spiritual life.

This week, pay attention to your own patterns with anger. Notice how it feels when you resolve conflict quickly versus when you let it simmer. Experiment with Paul's principle, but use wisdom about safety and timing. Sometimes same-day resolution is a simple apology; sometimes it's just deciding not to let anger control your heart while you wait for the right moment to have a harder conversation.

You've done excellent thinking today about a genuinely difficult topic. Keep wrestling with these questions, that wrestling itself is part of growing in wisdom. The goal isn't perfect conflict resolution but growing in the kind of love that doesn't let the sun go down on destructive anger.

Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that anger is a normal feeling, but keeping it for too long makes it grow bigger and meaner, hurting both them and their relationships.

If Kids Ask "What if the other person won't say sorry?"

Say: "You can't control what they do, but you can control what you do. You can ask God to help your heart not stay angry, even if they're not ready to make up yet."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been really angry at a brother, sister, or friend. Keep them up, I want to see how many of you have felt this way. Good, almost everyone. Now raise your hand if that anger lasted for more than one day.

Here's a harder question: think about a time when you stayed angry at someone for several days. How did you feel toward that person on day one compared to day three? For most of us, the anger didn't stay the same, it got bigger, meaner, and harder to let go of. Maybe you started thinking about other things they had done wrong too.

That's totally normal, and your feelings make sense. When someone hurts us or treats us unfairly, of course we feel angry! But here's what's tricky: anger is like a small fire. If you put it out quickly, everything's fine. But if you let it keep burning, it grows bigger and can burn down things you didn't want to lose.

This is like Anna in "Frozen" when she's angry at Elsa for shutting her out, or like Woody when he's jealous of Buzz in "Toy Story." At first, their feelings make total sense. But the longer they hold onto those angry feelings, the more those feelings start to hurt everyone around them, including themselves.

The tricky part is figuring out how to deal with angry feelings quickly instead of letting them grow into something bigger and meaner. It's hard because sometimes we want to stay angry. Sometimes it feels good to be mad, or we think the other person deserves it.

Today we're going to hear about Paul writing to some Christians who were having trouble getting along. He gave them some very specific advice about how long to stay angry. Let's find out what he told them and why he thought it mattered so much.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to sibling conflicts and friend drama. Acknowledge their experiences briefly ("I can tell some of you know exactly what I'm talking about"), then keep moving toward the story to maintain engagement.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Imagine you're living in a big, busy city called Ephesus about two thousand years ago. It's loud and crowded, with people from all over the world living there, buying and selling things, and practicing different religions.

In this city, there's a new group of people who have decided to follow Jesus. But here's the thing, they come from completely different backgrounds. Some used to worship Greek gods, some were Jewish, some were rich, some were poor, some were slaves, some were masters.

Now they're all trying to be one big church family, but it's not easy! They're having arguments. People are saying mean things to each other. Some are even stealing from each other. It's like a huge family with lots of problems.

Imagine how frustrated and worried you would feel if your church was like this, people fighting, lying to each other, saying hurtful things. How would you feel coming to church each week knowing there might be drama?

Paul, who was like a spiritual father to this church, heard about all these problems. He was far away and couldn't come visit right away, so he wrote them a letter. But this wasn't just any letter, it was like getting advice from the wisest, most loving parent you can imagine.

Paul started his letter by reminding them of who they were in Jesus. He told them they were God's beloved children, chosen and treasured. But then he got very specific about how they should treat each other daily.

He told them to stop lying to each other and start telling the truth. He told people who had been stealing to get jobs and work hard so they could actually give to people who needed help. He told them to watch their words and only say things that would build each other up.

But then Paul got to something that was happening in almost every household and friendship in Ephesus: people getting angry and staying angry. Sound familiar?

Paul knew that anger wasn't going away. People living together, working together, and trying to follow Jesus together were still going to have conflicts. Kids would fight with siblings, parents would get frustrated, friends would hurt each other's feelings.

So Paul didn't say "never be angry." Instead, he gave them something much more practical and surprising. He gave them a time limit.

Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)

26 "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold."

Do you hear what Paul was saying? He was telling them, "It's okay to feel angry, that's normal. But don't let that angry feeling last past sunset. Deal with it before you go to bed."

Paul wasn't just giving good relationship advice. He was warning them about something spiritual and dangerous. He said that when we hold onto anger past bedtime, we give the devil a way to get into our hearts and relationships and make things much worse.

Think about it: when you go to bed angry at someone, what happens in your mind while you're lying there? You start thinking about all the other things they've done wrong. You imagine what you'll say to them or how you'll get them back. The anger grows bigger and meaner.

Paul knew that angry feelings that sleep over don't stay the same, they turn into something much worse. They turn into bitterness, revenge, and hatred. They make us want to hurt people back instead of making things right.

So Paul was saying, "Deal with it quickly! Before the sun goes down, work it out. Apologize if you need to. Forgive if you can. Don't let that anger spend the night in your heart."

Paul wasn't saying it would be easy. Sometimes the hardest thing in the world is to say "I'm sorry" when you're still feeling hurt or angry. Sometimes it's really hard to forgive someone when they've been mean to you.

But Paul had learned something important: the longer you wait to fix a relationship problem, the harder it gets to fix. And the more opportunity you give the devil to turn a normal conflict into something that could destroy your friendship or family relationship.

When the Christians in Ephesus started following Paul's advice, when they started working out their anger the same day instead of letting it build up, something amazing happened. Their church became known for love instead of fighting. Families got stronger. Friendships lasted.

People in their city started noticing that these Jesus followers were different. They didn't stay mad for days and days. They didn't let little problems turn into big feuds. They dealt with their feelings quickly and honestly.

Paul's advice worked because he understood something important about how our hearts work: feelings that we keep too long change into different feelings. Anger turns into bitterness. Hurt turns into hatred. But when we deal with our anger quickly, it can actually help us understand each other better and become closer friends.

Sometimes in our lives, we get angry at our family, our friends, or people at school. Paul's advice is still good for us: it's okay to feel angry, but don't keep it past bedtime. Work it out quickly so it doesn't grow

into something bigger and meaner.

What we learn from Paul's letter is that God cares about our daily relationships. He knows we'll have conflicts, but He gives us wisdom about how to handle them in ways that make our relationships stronger instead of destroying them.

The amazing truth is that when we follow Paul's advice about dealing with anger quickly, we protect our hearts, our relationships, and give God a chance to help us work things out in ways that bring us closer together.

Pause here. Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Growing Feeling

Think about a time when you stayed mad at someone for several days. Maybe a sibling broke something of yours, or a friend said something mean, or someone at school wasn't fair to you. On the first day, you were just angry about what they did. But what other feelings started growing as the days went by?

Listen For: "I started thinking about other times they were mean," "I wanted to get them back," "I didn't want to be their friend anymore." Affirm: "Yes, that's exactly what Paul was worried about, anger growing into something bigger."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Paul said to work out anger before sunset, but let's be honest, sometimes that feels impossible. Can you think of a situation where saying sorry or forgiving someone the same day would be really, really hard? What makes it so difficult?

If They Say: "What if they hurt me really badly?", respond: "That's a great question. Sometimes we need God's help to forgive big hurts, and sometimes it takes time to work out complicated problems."

Question 3: The Devil's Foothold

Paul warned that keeping anger too long gives the devil a foothold, like a way to sneak into our hearts and make things worse. What do you think that means? How might the devil use our angry feelings to cause more problems?

Connect: "This is exactly why Paul wanted them to resolve anger quickly, he knew it could grow into something much more dangerous for their hearts and relationships."

Question 4: The Better Way

Imagine two families: in one family, people stay mad for days when they have fights. In the other family, they work things out before bedtime, even when it's hard. What do you think would be different about living in those two families?

If They Say: "The second family would be happier", ask: "Why do you think that would be? What would make the difference?"

You're absolutely right that dealing with anger quickly makes families and friendships stronger. It's not easy, but it keeps small problems from becoming big problems and helps us trust each other more.

4. Activity: The Knot Challenge (8 minutes)

Zero Props Required , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

Purpose

This activity reinforces Paul's teaching by having kids physically experience how problems get more tangled and harder to solve when they're left alone. Success looks like kids discovering that quick action prevents complications while delayed action makes resolution much more difficult.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do the Knot Challenge. Everyone stand in a circle and hold hands with your neighbors. Now I need you to let go of hands for a moment and create one simple "knot", maybe step under someone's arms or step over joined hands. Make one simple tangle, then grab hands again.

Your challenge is to untangle yourselves back into a perfect circle without anyone letting go of hands. But here's the twist: every 30 seconds that you don't solve the first knot, I'm going to ask you to create one more tangle while still holding hands.

This is exactly like anger problems in real life. If you solve the first problem quickly, it stays simple. But if you wait, more problems get added on top of the first problem, and everything becomes much more complicated to solve.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was warning about, conflicts that don't get resolved quickly become much harder to solve as more time passes and more issues get layered on top.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start with your first simple knot and begin trying to solve it. I'm watching the clock, you have 30 seconds before I add another complication. Work together to communicate and help each other figure out the moves.

Time's up! Now add another tangle, someone step through arms or duck under. Keep holding hands! Notice how this is getting harder to solve, not easier. This is what Paul meant about not letting the sun go down on anger.

I see some of you trying to communicate about which direction to move, which hand to lift up, who needs to duck down. Keep talking to each other, you need everyone working together to solve this, just like resolving conflicts in families.

Great job working together! Look at how much harder it got when we kept adding tangles instead of solving the first one quickly. And celebrate how good it feels when you finally get untangled and can stand in a nice, peaceful circle again.

Notice how much more work it took to solve the problem when we kept adding complications. This is the physical version of what happens when we let anger build up instead of resolving it quickly, everything gets more tangled and complicated.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize they're getting more tangled instead of less tangled, this is the physical representation of what Paul warned about with unresolved anger turning into bitterness and resentment.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to try solving the problem when it was simple versus when it had multiple tangles? This is exactly what Paul was teaching, anger problems that get solved quickly stay simple, but anger that sits overnight gets more complicated and much harder to untangle. Same-day resolution keeps our relationships from getting knotted up.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God knows that we'll sometimes feel angry at people we care about, that's normal and okay. But Paul teaches us that anger has an expiration date. When we keep it past bedtime, it grows bigger and meaner and gives the devil ways to hurt our hearts and relationships.

This doesn't mean you should never feel angry or that you have to pretend everything's fine when someone hurts you. It means that when you're mad at someone, you should try to work it out before you go to sleep, even when it's hard.

The amazing result is that when we deal with anger quickly, our families and friendships get stronger instead of weaker. We learn to trust each other more because we know that problems get solved instead of just piling up.

This Week's Challenge

This week, if you get angry at someone in your family, try Paul's advice: work it out before bedtime. It might mean saying sorry, asking for forgiveness, or just telling God about your feelings and asking Him to help your heart. Notice how it feels different to go to sleep with a clear heart.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us through Paul that it's okay to feel angry sometimes. Help us to be quick to work out problems with people we love. When it's hard to say sorry or forgive, give us courage and help us remember that You forgive us. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

Your Main Job Today

Help children understand that God wants us to make up with people before we go to sleep when we're mad at them.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
 - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
 - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
 - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
 - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
-

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare anger to a sticker that gets stickier and harder to remove the longer you leave it on something.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or forgiveness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God is So Good," or "If I Were a Butterfly." Use movements: arms spread wide for God's love, hugs for forgiveness, and gentle hand-holding during the chorus.

What beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because we have a very important story to hear about what God wants us to do when we feel mad at someone.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

Formation: Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when talking about anger growing, sound warm and gentle when talking about God's solution.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who loved Jesus very, very much.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Paul heard that some of his friends who loved Jesus were having a big problem. They were getting mad at each other and staying mad for days and days!

[Make an angry face, cross arms]

Some people in their church were mad at their friends. Some kids were mad at their brothers and sisters. Some grown-ups were mad at their neighbors. And they weren't making up!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look worried]

Paul was very worried about his friends. He knew that when we stay mad for a long time, our mad feelings get bigger and meaner. It's like when you have a little owie and you don't take care of it, it gets worse!

[Move to center, speak with love and authority]

So Paul wrote them a letter with very special instructions from God. He told them something that might surprise you!

[Look around at each child with a gentle smile]

Paul didn't say, "Never, ever feel mad." He knew that sometimes we do feel mad, and that's okay. Even good people feel mad sometimes!

Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)

"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what that means? Paul said, "It's okay to feel mad, but don't go to sleep while you're still mad at someone. Make up before bedtime!"

[Point to an imaginary sun, then make it go down with your hand]

Paul said, "Don't let the sun go down while you're angry." That means before it gets dark and time for bed, work it out!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul knew something very important: mad feelings that stay in our hearts all night get bigger and stronger. They don't go away, they grow!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So Paul told his friends: "When you're mad at someone, try to make up the same day. Say sorry if you need to. Say 'I forgive you' if you can."

[Speak with excitement]

And guess what happened when Paul's friends started doing this? Their families got happier! Their church became a place full of love instead of fighting!

[Pause dramatically]

Paul's instructions work because God knows how our hearts work. He knows that mad feelings grow bigger when we keep them too long, but they get smaller when we deal with them quickly.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we get mad at our mom or dad, or our brothers and sisters, or our friends at school. Paul's advice is for us too: it's okay to feel mad, but try to make up before bedtime!

[Move closer to the children]

When you're mad at someone, you can say "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you" or ask a grown-up to help you work it out. You can even pray and ask God to help your heart feel better!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves us so much that He gives us good advice about how to be happy with the people we love. When we follow Paul's teaching, our families are more peaceful and our hearts feel lighter!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Formation: Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

Teacher Circulation: Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

Discussion Questions

Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.

1. How do you think Paul's friends felt when they were mad at each other?
 2. Why do you think Paul said to make up before bedtime?
 3. What would it feel like to go to sleep mad at your brother or sister?
 4. What would you do if someone was mean to you at school?
 5. How does it feel when someone says sorry to you?
 6. How does it feel when you say sorry to someone else?
 7. What happens when mad feelings get bigger?
 8. Who could help you when you're mad at someone?
 9. Why do you think God wants us to make up quickly?
 10. How do you think God helps us when we're mad?
 11. What's the difference between feeling mad and staying mad?
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12. When is it hard to say sorry?

13. When is it hard to forgive someone?

14. What makes you feel better when you're upset?

15. How would your family be different if everyone made up quickly?

16. What can you do to help when other people are mad at each other?

17. Why is it good to solve problems the same day?

18. What would you pray when you're mad at someone?

19. How does God feel when we make up with people?

20. What did you learn from Paul's story?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our circle. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about forgiveness or love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love is Something You Do." Include movements like hugging motions during verses about love and gentle hand-holding during choruses.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time. Cross your legs, fold your hands, and bow your heads as we talk to God together.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

Formation: Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

Dear God, thank you for Paul who taught us about making up quickly when we're mad.

[Pause]

*Help us remember that when we're mad at someone, we should try to make up before bedtime.
Give us brave hearts to say sorry and to forgive.*

[Pause]

*Thank you for loving us so much that You want our families and friends to be happy and peaceful.
Help us to have kind hearts like Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about forgiveness or making up with people. Examples: "Help me say sorry when I'm wrong" or "Thank you for helping us make up with our friends."

Remember, when you feel mad at someone this week, you can ask God to help your heart and try to make up before you go to sleep. Have a wonderful week, and remember that God loves you very much!

From Weapons to Farming Tools

God's Vision for True Peace, Can this transformation happen now or only in the future?

Isaiah 2:1-5

Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

The Passage

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

1 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 5 Come, house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Context

Isaiah receives this vision during a time of international turmoil in the 8th century BC, when the kingdom of Judah faced constant military threats from Assyria and neighboring nations. The people lived with the daily reality of armies, weapons, and warfare as necessary tools for survival. Into this context of fear and militarization, God gives Isaiah a stunning vision of a completely different future.

This prophecy opens the main body of Isaiah's message and establishes the ultimate goal toward which all of God's actions in history are moving. The vision comes as both comfort to a frightened people and challenge to their assumptions about how security and peace are achieved. It dares to imagine a world where the fundamental structures that perpetuate conflict are transformed.

The Big Idea

God's ultimate vision is the transformation of instruments of enmity into instruments of cultivation, not merely the absence of war, but the repurposing of everything once used to harm into tools that help life flourish.

This transformation goes deeper than weapons control or conflict management. It reimagines the very materials and energy once devoted to defeating enemies as resources for mutual care and cultivation. The vision challenges us to consider not just ending harmful patterns, but converting their power into life-giving ones.

Theological Core

- **Divine Judgment Enables Peace.** God's judgment "between the nations" creates the conditions where transformation becomes possible, not human diplomacy alone, but divine intervention in the structures that perpetuate conflict.
 - **Transformation Over Destruction.** Rather than destroying weapons, the vision transforms them into farming tools, suggesting that the power and resources once used for harm can be redirected toward nurturing life and growth.
 - **End of Enemy-Making.** The phrase "nor will they train for war anymore" indicates the cessation of preparing for enmity, the fundamental shift from seeing others as potential threats to seeing them as partners in flourishing.
 - **Eschatological Hope and Present Call.** While the vision looks to "the last days," it concludes with an immediate invitation: "Come, house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord," suggesting both future hope and present possibility.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- God's vision of peace involves transforming the very instruments of conflict into tools for mutual flourishing
 - The timing and agency questions are complex, this may require divine action while also calling for human participation
 - True peace-making means redirecting resources from defense against enemies toward care for all people
 - Discernment involves asking how our current defensive strategies might be transformed into nurturing ones
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Grades 4, 6

- God wants people to turn their hurtful actions and words into helpful ones
 - When we feel like fighting or being mean, we can choose to use that energy to help instead
 - Real peace happens when we stop preparing to hurt people and start preparing to care for them
 - Even when we feel scared or angry, we can still choose to do what helps rather than what hurts
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants everyone to be friends instead of fighting
 - God helps people change mean things into nice things
 - We can help make God's peaceful world by being kind and helping others
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying the Timeline.** This vision involves divine judgment that enables transformation, avoid suggesting this is purely about human effort or that it's completely removed
-

from present action. Acknowledge the tension between divine action and human participation.

- **Romanticizing Peace Without Justice.** The transformation comes after God's judgment "between the nations", true peace requires addressing systemic injustices, not just individual niceness or conflict avoidance.
- **Making It Only Personal.** While individual applications are valid, this is fundamentally about societal and international transformation. Don't reduce it to personal anger management without acknowledging the larger vision.
- **Ignoring Present Complexity.** Avoid suggesting that all current defensive measures are wrong while also not dismissing the vision as irrelevant. Help students wrestle with what partial embodiment might look like in our imperfect world.

Handling Hard Questions

"If God wants peace, why doesn't He just make everyone stop fighting now?"

This vision shows that God is working toward that ultimate peace, but it involves more than just stopping fights, it requires transforming the hearts, systems, and relationships that create conflict in the first place. God could force peace, but real peace means people choosing to care for each other. The vision shows us where God is leading history and invites us to participate in that transformation now, even though the complete fulfillment awaits God's future action. We can practice "beating swords into plowshares" in our relationships and communities while trusting God for the ultimate fulfillment.

"What about when we need weapons to protect innocent people from bad guys?"

This vision acknowledges that we live in a world where protection is sometimes necessary, the passage doesn't condemn all present defensive measures. But it challenges us to see these as temporary necessities, not permanent solutions. The vision asks us to imagine: what would it look like to redirect some of our defensive energy toward addressing the root causes that create "bad guys" in the first place? How can we work toward a world where fewer people become threats because more people experience justice, care, and opportunity? It's about both protecting people now and working toward the conditions where such protection becomes unnecessary.

"How do we know when to fight back and when to make peace?"

This passage doesn't give us a simple formula, but it does give us a direction to aim toward, transformation rather than destruction when possible, cultivation rather than domination as our goal. In difficult situations, we can ask: Is there a way to address this conflict that moves us closer to the vision of mutual flourishing? How can we respond that protects people while also working toward transformation of the underlying problems? Sometimes that may require firm resistance to harmful actions, but the goal is always the restoration and transformation described in Isaiah's vision, not permanent enmity.

The One Thing to Remember

God's vision is not just the absence of conflict, but the transformation of all our defensive energy into tools for helping each other flourish, a future that calls us to participate now even while awaiting its complete fulfillment.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with Isaiah's radical vision of transformation and the tension between divine action and human participation. Help them explore what "beating swords into plowshares" might look like in their context while honoring the complexity of the timeline.

The Tension to Frame

Is this vision eschatological only, awaiting divine action, or does it call for present partial embodiment? What does it mean for us to live into this vision now?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate students' awareness of real conflicts and the complexity of peace-making in an imperfect world
 - Honor their questions about timing and agency, this is genuinely complex theological territory
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- Let them wrestle with the practical implications rather than giving quick answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about your school or community. There's probably at least one conflict that seems totally stuck, groups that just can't get along, people who have given up on each other, situations where everyone is basically in defensive mode. Maybe it's between different social groups, different economic classes, different political views, or even different schools that are rivals. You know the kind of situation where people have basically written each other off as enemies.

Now imagine someone comes along and says, "I have a vision of these groups not just tolerating each other, but actually working together. I can see them taking all the energy and resources they're using to defend against each other and channeling it into projects that help everyone flourish." Your first thought might be, "That sounds nice, but it's never going to happen. These people hate each other too much."

That's exactly the kind of seemingly impossible transformation that Isaiah describes in today's passage. He's writing to people living in constant fear of invasion, surrounded by nations that saw each other as threats, in a world where military strength was the only path to security. And into this reality, he declares a vision of total transformation.

As we read, I want you to pay attention to two things: first, the specific nature of the transformation he describes, it's not just about stopping violence, but about repurposing the tools and energy of violence. And second, notice the tension between divine action and human participation in making this vision real.

Open your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 2, and let's read verses 1 through 5 silently first.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This is visionary poetry, so let them feel the weight and beauty of the language. If someone seems stuck on difficult words, help quietly. Watch for students who finish early and encourage them to reread and think about the questions below.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific transformation does Isaiah describe happening to weapons?
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- What role does God's judgment play in enabling this transformation?

- What surprises you most about this vision of peace?

- How does verse 5 connect the future vision to present action?

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

1 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 5 Come, house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read with expression. This is poetry and vision, so encourage them to read it like the dramatic literature it is. Let readers pass if they prefer.

Reader 1: Verses 1, 2 (Setting the vision) **Reader 2:** Verse 3 (Nations seeking God's teaching) **Reader 3:** Verses 4, 5 (Transformation and invitation)

Listen for the movement in this passage, from a specific historical moment to an ultimate vision to an immediate invitation. This isn't just information; it's prophetic poetry designed to reshape imagination.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help groups that seem stuck with prompts like "What

confused you most?" or "What would you want to know more about?"

Get into groups of three or four people. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what we just read, not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about. Maybe something confused you, or something seemed unrealistic, or you want to know more about how something would actually work. Good questions might start with "Why would..." or "How could..." or "What if..." You have three minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the conversation with their questions. Your job is to facilitate deeper thinking, not to lecture. Guide discovery rather than giving answers.

Collecting Questions: Write their questions on the board. Look for themes and start with questions that multiple students will connect with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between beating swords into plowshares versus just getting rid of weapons entirely?"
- "Why do you think God's judgment comes before the transformation rather than the transformation leading to peace?"
- "What would it mean for nations to stop training for war, not just stop fighting, but stop preparing to fight?"
- "How do you interpret the tension between 'in the last days' and 'come, let us walk in the light of the Lord' now?"
- "What are some modern examples of 'swords' that could theoretically be beaten into 'plowshares'?"
- "If this vision came true, what would change in how countries allocate their budgets and resources?"
- "What would have to happen in people's hearts and minds for them to stop seeing other nations as potential enemies?"

- "Is this vision meant to be taken literally, metaphorically, or both, and why does that matter?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Isaiah isn't just describing the absence of war, he's describing the transformation of the tools and energy of war into tools and energy for cultivation. The same metal, the same resources, the same human capacity that was once used to harm is now used to help life flourish. It's not destruction of power, but redirection of power. That's a radically different vision of peace than just "everyone stops fighting."

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see the defensive energy that could potentially be transformed into cultivating energy? This might be at school, in your family relationships, in how you engage with social media, or in how you think about people who are different from you. What are the "swords" in your context, the things you use to defend against people you see as potential enemies?

Real Issues This Connects To

- School cliques that spend energy maintaining boundaries against other groups rather than working on common projects
 - Family conflicts where everyone is in defensive mode rather than working toward mutual understanding
 - Political polarization where people focus on defeating the other side rather than solving shared problems
 - Social media culture that rewards quick attacks on opponents rather than thoughtful engagement
 - Economic inequality where resources go toward protecting privilege rather than expanding opportunity
 - Personal relationships where you're always preparing for the other person to hurt you rather than investing in growth together
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to prescriptive answers. Some situations are genuinely complex and don't have simple solutions. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully transform defensive energy into cultivating energy?"
- "What would help you personally move from preparing for conflict to preparing for mutual flourishing?"
- "How do you discern when protective measures are necessary versus when they're becoming barriers to transformation?"
- "What's the difference between naive peace-making and the kind of transformation Isaiah describes?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God's vision for peace isn't just the absence of conflict, but the transformation of all our defensive energy into tools for helping each other flourish. This is both a future hope that requires divine action and a present invitation to participate in that transformation wherever we can. The complexity and challenge of living into this vision is real, it's not simple or easy.

This week, pay attention to the moments when you're in defensive mode, preparing for conflict, protecting against potential enemies, using energy to maintain boundaries against others. Ask yourself: Is there any way this defensive energy could be transformed into cultivating energy instead? What would it look like to redirect some of your protective resources toward helping people flourish?

I'm proud of the thoughtful way you wrestled with these questions today. Keep asking the hard questions about how God's vision connects to our complex reality. The world needs people who can imagine transformation, not just management of conflicts.

Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants people to transform tools of hurting into tools of helping, and what that looks like in their relationships and choices.

If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God just make everyone be nice?"

Say: "God is working toward a world where everyone chooses to be kind and helpful. Real peace happens when people decide to care for each other, not when someone forces them to."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation at school where groups of kids don't get along. Maybe it's different grades, or kids who like different things, or groups that have just decided they don't like each other. Keep your hands up if you've ever felt like you needed to be ready to defend yourself or your friends from another group.

Now here's a harder question: Have you ever been in a situation where you spent more time and energy preparing for a fight or getting ready to be mean than you did trying to solve the actual problem? Like, maybe you and your friends spent hours planning what you'd say if those other kids were mean to you, or figuring out how to avoid them, or talking about how much you didn't like them.

Those feelings totally make sense. When people have been mean to us or when we think they might be mean, our brains want to protect us. It's normal to want to be ready. But sometimes we can spend so much energy getting ready to fight or be mean back that we forget there might be other ways to handle the situation.

This is like what happens in some movies you might know. In "How to Train Your Dragon," the Vikings spent all their time making weapons and training to fight dragons because they saw dragons as enemies. But then Hiccup discovered that dragons could actually be friends and helpers if you approached them differently. Instead of using all that energy to fight dragons, they learned to work with them.

The tricky part is figuring out when to stop preparing for a fight and start preparing to work together instead. How do you know when it's safe to let your guard down? How do you know when someone might actually want to be friends?

Today we're going to hear about a prophet named Isaiah who had a vision from God about what the world could look like if people stopped spending their energy preparing to hurt each other and started using that same energy to help each other instead. It's a pretty amazing idea. Let's find out what God showed him.

What to Expect: Kids may share specific conflicts from school. Acknowledge them briefly, "That sounds really hard", but keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may get stuck on fairness issues; validate that too.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Isaiah lived in a time when countries were constantly fighting each other. Everywhere you looked, armies were marching, kings were building bigger weapons, and people were always worried about who might attack them next.

In Isaiah's country of Judah, people went to bed every night wondering if enemy soldiers would come in the morning. Parents taught their children how to hide. Blacksmiths spent their days making swords and spears instead of tools for farming. Everyone was always getting ready for the next war.

It was exhausting and scary. The people felt trapped. They needed weapons to protect themselves, but making weapons meant they couldn't make as many plows and tools for growing food. They needed soldiers, but training soldiers meant fewer people could work on building houses and roads.

Imagine living like that, always looking over your shoulder, always preparing for someone to hurt you. It would be like going to school every day expecting a fight, never being able to relax and just focus on learning or playing.

But then God gave Isaiah an incredible vision. God showed Isaiah a picture of the future that was so different, so wonderful, that it must have taken Isaiah's breath away.

In this vision, Isaiah saw all the nations of the world, countries that had been enemies for generations, walking together toward God's mountain. They weren't marching to fight. They were coming to learn.

"We want to know God's ways," they were saying to each other. "We want to learn how to live well together. Teach us how to walk in God's paths."

And then God did something amazing. Instead of punishing these nations for all their fighting, God became like the wisest judge in the world. When countries had disagreements, they brought their

problems to God to settle instead of starting wars.

But here's the part that would have shocked Isaiah the most. God told him that in this future, people would take their weapons, their swords and spears that they had spent so much time and money making, and they would transform them into tools for growing food.

Isaiah 2:4a (NIV)

4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Can you picture that? Taking a sword, a weapon made for hurting people, and hammering it into a plow that helps grow food to feed people. Taking a spear, made for fighting, and turning it into a tool for helping fruit trees grow better.

It's the same metal, the same materials, but completely different purposes. Instead of using that metal to hurt, now it helps. Instead of destroying, it creates. Instead of taking life, it helps life grow.

But God's vision got even better than that.

Isaiah 2:4b (NIV)

4 Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Not only would they stop fighting, they would stop preparing to fight. No more armies practicing for battle. No more young people spending years learning how to hurt others. No more going to bed scared about what tomorrow might bring.

All that time, all that energy, all those resources that used to go into preparing for war could now go into preparing for something much better, helping each other and making good things grow.

When Isaiah heard this vision, he must have thought, "This sounds too good to be true. But this is God talking. If God can imagine it, maybe it really is possible."

The amazing thing about this vision is that it wasn't just about stopping the bad stuff. It was about transforming all that energy and strength into good stuff instead. The same passion, the same effort, the

same creativity that people had been using to defeat their enemies could now be used to help everyone flourish.

Think about how much time and energy the people in Isaiah's day spent thinking about their enemies, preparing for attacks, and building defenses. Now imagine all of that same time and energy being used to think about how to help people, how to grow food for everyone, and how to build things that make life better.

And here's what makes this vision really special: God didn't just say "This might happen someday." At the end, God gave an invitation that people could start living this way right now.

Sometimes in our lives, we spend a lot of energy preparing to be hurt by other people or preparing to hurt them back. We might spend time thinking about comeback lines for when someone is mean to us, or planning how to get revenge, or figuring out how to avoid people we don't like.

But God's vision shows us a different way. What if we took all that same energy and used it to figure out how to help people instead? What if we used our creativity to solve problems together instead of trying to defeat each other?

That's what Isaiah saw in his vision from God. Not just people being a little nicer to each other, but people completely changing what they use their strength and energy for. Instead of hurting, helping. Instead of destroying, creating. Instead of taking, giving.

Pause here. Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine you lived in Isaiah's time when everyone was always preparing for war, always worried about enemies. Then someone tells you about this vision where all the weapons get turned into farming tools and everyone stops fighting. What do you think your first feeling would be? Would it be excitement, or doubt, or something else? Why?

Listen For: "I wouldn't believe it," "That sounds too good to be true", affirm: "That makes total sense. It would be hard to imagine after so much fighting."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Let's say you're really mad at someone who's been mean to you, and you've been planning exactly what you're going to say to get them back. Then you remember Isaiah's vision about turning "weapons" into "farming tools." What would that look like in your situation? What would it mean to turn your anger energy into helping energy instead?

If They Say: If they say "I'd still want to get them back", respond "That feeling is totally normal. What makes changing that energy so hard?"

Question 3: The Amazing Transformation

In the vision, the same metal that was used for swords becomes metal for plows. It's not thrown away or destroyed, it's transformed into something helpful. Can you think of a time when you've seen someone take something meant for hurting and change it into something meant for helping? Or when you've done that yourself?

Connect: This is exactly what made God's vision so amazing, not destroying strength, but redirecting it.

Question 4: The Big Picture

The vision says people would stop "training for war", not just stop fighting, but stop preparing to fight. What do you think would be different in the world if people spent all the time they usually spend preparing to be mean or getting ready for fights on preparing to help each other instead?

If They Say: If they worry "But what about bad people?", respond "That's a good question. What do you think would need to happen for there to be fewer people who want to hurt others?"

You're asking such good questions. I can see you really understand how big and amazing this vision is. It's not just about being a little nicer, it's about completely changing what we use our energy for. Let's do an activity that helps us feel what this transformation is like.

4. Activity: Weapon to Tool Transformation (8 minutes)

Zero Props Required , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of transformation by having kids physically experience moving from defensive preparation to collaborative creation. Success looks like kids discovering that the same energy used for defense can become energy for building something good together.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to call this "Building the Bridge." I'm going to divide you into two groups, and each group will start on opposite sides of the room facing each other. Your first job is to "protect your territory", stand with your arms crossed, looking serious, making sure the other group doesn't cross into your space.

But here's the challenge: I'm going to give both groups the same secret mission. Your job is to figure out how to build an invisible bridge across the room that both groups can use. The catch is, you can't build your half of the bridge while you're in defensive position. You have to decide when to stop defending and start building together.

The twist is this: the bridge will only work if both sides contribute their building energy, and it will only stay up if both sides keep working together to maintain it. You'll discover that the strength you're using to defend your territory is exactly the same strength you need to build the bridge.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Isaiah's vision, the same energy and strength that people used to fight each other became the energy they used to work together and create good things.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First phase: Let them stay in defensive positions for about 30 seconds. Notice how they're using their energy and attention. Observe how focused they are on the other group as a potential threat.

The struggle: As they realize they need to build together, watch for kids who are afraid to let their guard down first. Some will want to keep defending while trying to build, which won't work for this activity.

Coaching phrases: "I notice you're really good at protecting, but the bridge needs that same strength..." "I wonder if there's someone from the other side who also wants to build..." "What would happen if both sides stepped forward at the same time?"

The breakthrough: Celebrate when groups start moving toward the center with building motions instead of defensive ones. Point out how their energy shifted from protecting against each other to creating together.

Completion: Once they're "building" together, have them notice how the energy in the room changed from tense to collaborative, and how they're using the same physical strength but for a completely different purpose.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to drop their defensive stance and reach toward the other group, this is the physical representation of "beating swords into plowshares."

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were in defensive mode versus when you were building together? The same energy that you used to protect your territory became the energy you used to build something good together. That's exactly what Isaiah saw in his vision, people taking the strength they used to fight each other and using it to create things that helped everyone instead.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God has an amazing vision where people stop using their energy to prepare to hurt each other and start using that same energy to help each other instead. It's like taking a weapon and transforming it into a tool for growing food, the same metal, but completely different purpose.

This doesn't mean we should never protect ourselves or that we should just let people be mean to us. God knows that sometimes we need to be careful. But the vision shows us that God wants us to look for ways to transform our defensive energy into helpful energy whenever we can.

The amazing result? When people use their strength to help each other instead of hurt each other, everyone gets to feel safe, everyone gets to be creative, and everyone gets to work on making good things grow.

This Week's Challenge

This week, notice when you're spending energy preparing to defend yourself against someone or getting ready to be mean back to someone. Ask yourself: "Is there a way I could use this same energy to help or build something good instead?" Try it once and see what happens.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for your amazing vision where everyone works together instead of fighting. Help us this week to use our energy for helping and building good things instead of preparing to hurt people. When we feel scared or angry, remind us that we can choose to help instead. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants everyone to be friends and help each other grow good things instead of fighting.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
 - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
 - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
 - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
 - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
-

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare swords becoming plows to crayons, you can use them to scribble mean pictures or draw kind pictures for friends.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about peace and helping. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: stretch arms wide during "love" lyrics, make growing motions during "help" lyrics, point to friends during "together" lyrics.

Great singing! You know what? That song is about exactly what God wants, for everyone to love each other and help each other. Today we're going to hear about God's special dream for the whole world. Let's sit down in our story shape and get ready to hear something amazing!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

Formation: Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when talking about fighting, sound excited when talking about God's dream.

Today we're going to meet a man named Isaiah who talked to God!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Long, long ago, there were lots of countries that were always fighting. They made swords and spears to hurt each other. People were scared and sad all the time.

[Make a sad, worried face]

Every day, the moms and dads worried. The kids couldn't play outside safely. Everyone spent their time getting ready to fight instead of playing and growing food and having fun.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to excited]

But then God gave Isaiah a wonderful dream! God showed him what the world could look like if everyone was friends!

[Move to center, speak with big, happy voice]

In God's dream, all the people from all the countries came together. They said, "We want to learn God's ways! We want to be kind to each other!"

[Move to side, sound amazed]

And then God said something super amazing. God said people would take their fighting tools and change them into helping tools!

Isaiah 2:4a (NIV)

4 They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what that means? It means taking something made for hurting and changing it into something made for helping! Like turning swords into tools for planting gardens!

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

But God's dream got even better! God said people would stop getting ready to fight completely!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, make growing motions with hands]

Instead of spending time learning how to fight, people would spend time learning how to grow food and help each other and make beautiful things!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

When Isaiah heard this dream, he was so excited! He knew that God could make this wonderful world happen!

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what the best part is? Everyone would be safe and happy! Kids could play together! Families could laugh together! People could work together to make good things!

[Pause dramatically]

God's dream is for everyone in the whole world to be friends and help each other instead of fighting!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, we might feel like being mean to someone who was mean to us. But God wants us to choose helping instead of hurting.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is not nice to you, you can choose to do something kind instead. When you feel mad, you can use that strong feeling to help someone instead of hurt them.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we choose to be helpers and friend-makers! That's how we start making God's wonderful dream come true!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Formation: Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and stand up! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think!

Teacher Circulation: Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

Discussion Questions

Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.

1. How do you think the people felt when they heard God's dream?
 2. What would you like about a world where everyone is friends?
 3. When someone is mean to you, how do you feel?
 4. What would you do if everyone at school was always kind?
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5. How can you help make God's dream come true?

6. What's something kind you could do for someone today?

7. How does it feel when you help someone?

8. What would you rather do, fight or help someone plant a garden?

9. Who is someone you could be extra kind to this week?

10. What games would you play if everyone was friends?

11. How do you think God feels about helping?

12. What's your favorite way to help someone?

13. How can we use our hands for helping instead of hurting?

14. What would you want to grow in God's peaceful world?

15. How can you be brave enough to be kind?

16. What did you learn about God's dream today?

17. What will you remember about this story?

18. How can you pray for God's dream to come true?

19. What would happen if everyone chose to help?

20. How can you be like the people in God's dream?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for our song. Who wants to share what they talked about?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about helping and kindness. Suggestions: "Make New Friends," "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with helping actions), or "This Little Light of Mine." Include specific movements: reach out to friends during friendship songs, make helping gestures during service lyrics.

Beautiful singing! Your voices sound like the happy people in God's dream! Now let's sit down for our prayer time.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

Formation: Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

Dear God, thank you for your wonderful dream where everyone is friends...

[Pause]

Help us this week to choose helping instead of hurting. When someone is not nice to us, help us remember to be kind anyway...

[Pause]

Help us remember that you want everyone to be friends and help each other. Show us ways to be good helpers...

[Pause]

Thank you that you love everyone and want everyone to be happy and safe. Help us make your dream come true by being kind helpers. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "God, help me be kind" or "God, thank you for friends."

Remember, you can help make God's wonderful dream come true by choosing to help people instead of hurt them. Have a great week being God's helpers!

The Mirror of Judgment

Reflexive Judgment, Can we bear the standards we apply to others?

Matthew 7:1-12

Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

The Passage

Matthew 7:1-12 (NIV)

1 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. 7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Context

Jesus is delivering His Sermon on the Mount to crowds of ordinary people who've been following Him throughout Galilee. This teaching comes after He's established the kingdom principles of blessing, salt and light, and radical righteousness. The people listening are struggling with how to live differently in a world full of moral complexity and religious hypocrisy.

Immediately before this passage, Jesus has been teaching about worry and serving two masters. Now He shifts to address how His followers should relate to others, particularly the tendency to focus critically on others while remaining blind to our own failings. This is practical instruction for people learning to live as citizens of God's kingdom.

The Big Idea

The standard we apply to others becomes the standard applied to us, creating a mirror effect where harsh judgment invites harsh judgment in return.

This isn't a prohibition against all moral discernment, Jesus Himself gives instructions about evaluating fruit and not giving sacred things to those who will destroy them. Rather, it's a warning against hypocritical, self-righteous judgment that refuses to acknowledge our own need for grace while harshly condemning others for their failures.

Theological Core

- **Reflexive Judgment.** The measure we use against others becomes the measure used against us, judgment operates like a mirror, reflecting back the standards we apply.
 - **Self-Awareness Before Criticism.** We must examine our own hearts and actions before attempting to correct others, acknowledging that we see clearly only when we've addressed our own failings.
 - **Merciful Discernment.** Wise evaluation of others is necessary and good, but it must be done with humility and grace rather than condemnation and superiority.
 - **God's Grace as Foundation.** Our ability to receive good gifts from God and treat others well flows from understanding our position as beloved but flawed children who depend entirely on divine grace.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- The standard we apply to others becomes the standard applied to us, harsh judgment invites harsh judgment in return
 - All judgment isn't prohibited, but hypocritical judgment that ignores our own failings while condemning others is dangerous
 - Self-examination and humility must precede any attempt to help others with their problems or mistakes
 - Discernment requires wisdom to know when and how to speak truth, balanced with recognition of our own need for grace
-

Grades 4, 6

- When we're mean or critical toward others, that meanness tends to come back to us in our relationships
 - We should look at our own mistakes and problems before pointing out what others are doing wrong
 - Being kind and forgiving to others helps create kindness and forgiveness in our friendships and family
 - Sometimes we feel like being critical, but we can choose to be helpful and kind instead
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind to others instead of pointing out everything they do wrong
 - God loves us even when we make mistakes, and He wants us to love others the same way
 - We can choose to say kind things and help people instead of being mean
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Prohibiting All Moral Evaluation.** The context shows Jesus isn't forbidding discernment or accountability, but warning against hypocritical condemnation. We still need to make wise decisions about relationships and behavior.
 - **Ignoring the Self-Examination Component.** The log and speck metaphor emphasizes that the problem isn't noticing others' issues, but doing so while ignoring our own greater failures and need for grace.
 - **Making This Only About "Being Nice."** This passage calls for honest self-reflection and genuine love, not superficial politeness that avoids all difficult conversations or moral standards.
 - **Missing the Reciprocal Nature.** The core insight is that judgment operates like a mirror, the harshness we extend will reflect back to us, while mercy enables mercy in return.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Does this mean we can never tell someone they're doing something wrong?"

Jesus isn't prohibiting all moral evaluation, notice He talks about helping remove specks from others' eyes once we've dealt with our own logs. The key is approaching others with humility and genuine care rather than condemnation. We can speak truth when we've examined our own hearts first and when our goal is restoration, not superiority.

"What about when someone is really hurting people? Shouldn't we judge that as wrong?"

Absolutely. Jesus Himself warns about giving sacred things to those who will destroy them, showing that discernment is necessary. The issue isn't making moral distinctions but doing so hypocritically, condemning others for sins we excuse in ourselves, or approaching correction with harshness rather than love.

"If harsh judgment comes back to us, does that mean all our problems are because we've been too critical?"

No, Jesus is describing a general principle, not a mechanical law. Bad things happen for many reasons. But He's warning that the spirit we extend toward others tends to shape how others respond to us and how we experience relationships. Mercy creates space for mercy; harshness often breeds harshness.

The One Thing to Remember

The mirror of judgment reflects back the measure we use, harsh criticism invites harsh criticism, but mercy toward others opens space for mercy toward us.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the complexity of moral judgment, helping them see the difference between necessary discernment and destructive hypocrisy. Focus on the reflexive nature of judgment and why self-examination must precede any attempt to correct others.

The Tension to Frame

How do we maintain moral standards and speak truth while avoiding the hypocritical judgment that Jesus warns against? Can we discern when evaluation is necessary versus when it becomes destructive?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with criticism and judgment, they know what it feels like to be harshly evaluated
 - Acknowledge the genuine difficulty of balancing accountability with grace, this isn't simple
 - Let them explore the tension rather than rushing to easy answers, wrestling with complexity builds wisdom
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about social media for a moment. You see someone post something you think is stupid, wrong, or offensive. Your thumb hovers over the keyboard. Part of you wants to call them out, correct them, maybe add a laughing emoji to show everyone how obviously wrong they are. You've got the perfect comeback that will expose their ignorance.

And you know what? Maybe they really are wrong. Maybe their opinion is genuinely harmful or their facts are completely off. You might even be doing the world a service by speaking up. Your criticism could be 100% accurate and completely justified.

But here's what gets complicated: how you respond in that moment doesn't just affect them. It shapes how people see you, how they respond to your mistakes, and what kind of online environment you're creating. The energy you put out tends to come back to you.

Today we're looking at Jesus teaching about something similar, except the stakes are even higher. He's talking about a principle that affects all our relationships: the measure we use to judge others becomes the measure used to judge us. The harshness we extend reflects back like a mirror.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 7, and as you read, think about whether this creates a world where we can never say anything is wrong, or whether there's a different way to approach truth-telling and accountability.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. This passage contains some challenging metaphors and transitions, help anyone struggling with the log/speck imagery or the connection between verses 6-12. Let them feel the weight of Jesus' warnings about judgment.

As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly is Jesus prohibiting in verses 1-2, and what does he mean by "measure"?
 - How do the log and speck metaphor change your understanding of the judgment warning?
 - What's the connection between judging others and the teachings about prayer and the Golden Rule?
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- Where do you see the tension between moral standards and grace in your own life?
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Matthew 7:1-12 (NIV)

1 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. 6 Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. 7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Choose confident readers for the dramatic log/speck metaphor and the parental gift analogy, these sections need emotion to land well.

Reader 1: Verses 1-5 (The judgment warning and log/speck metaphor) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-8 (Sacred things and asking/seeking) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-12 (Good gifts and the Golden Rule)

Listen for the tension in Jesus' voice, He's warning about something that really matters, but He's also painting a picture of radical hope about God's goodness.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help any that get stuck. If a group is struggling, ask "What surprised you most about what Jesus said?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Not "What does this mean?" but specific questions like "Why does Jesus connect judgment with prayer?" or "How big of a plank are we talking about here?" Ask what you really want to understand. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with their questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery, not lecture. Guide them to see patterns and connections through probing questions.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around judgment, hypocrisy, standards, and relationships. Start with questions most students will connect with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the passage about what kind of judgment Jesus is warning against?"
- "How does the log/speck metaphor change the meaning of 'do not judge'?"
- "What's the difference between the speck and the log, and why does that matter?"
- "Why might verse 6 about dogs and pigs seem to contradict the 'don't judge' teaching?"
- "How do verses 7-11 about God giving good gifts connect to judgment and the Golden Rule?"
- "When have you experienced the 'measure you use' principle in your own relationships?"
- "What would change if someone judged your mistakes the same way you judge theirs?"
- "How do you tell the difference between necessary accountability and destructive judgment?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus isn't creating a world where we can't evaluate anything or speak truth. But He's warning that judgment operates like a mirror, the harshness we extend tends to

reflect back to us. The key is approaching others with the same grace we desperately need for our own failures. When we judge from a place of humility rather than superiority, we create space for genuine healing instead of destruction.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this mirror principle playing out? Think about school drama, family conflicts, social media interactions, friend groups, and how you handle people who annoy you or make mistakes.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Social media responses when someone posts something ignorant or offensive
 - Family dynamics when siblings mess up or parents make hypocritical rules
 - Friend group situations when someone makes a bad choice or hurts others
 - Online gaming or group projects when teammates perform poorly
 - School or workplace situations involving rumors, gossip, or calling people out
 - Political or social justice conversations where you disagree with someone's views
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations genuinely require different responses. Help them think through discernment, when does accountability serve love versus when does it serve superiority?

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone approach a difficult conversation with humility, and how did it change the dynamic?"
 - "What would help you pause and examine your own heart before criticizing someone else?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between justice that serves love and judgment that serves ego?"
 - "What's the difference between wise discernment and hypocritical condemnation?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: the measure you use to judge others becomes the measure used to judge you. This doesn't mean becoming a moral relativist who never speaks truth. It means approaching others with the same grace you desperately need for your own failures. When you're tempted to harshly criticize someone, ask yourself if you could bear that same standard applied to your worst moments.

This week, pay attention to that moment when you're about to judge someone, whether out loud or just in your head. Notice what's happening in your heart. Are you seeking justice and restoration, or are you feeding your own sense of superiority? The difference matters, both for them and for the kind of person you're becoming.

You did good thinking today about really hard issues. Keep wrestling with these questions. The world needs people who can speak truth with humility and extend grace while maintaining standards. I'm confident you can learn to live with that kind of wisdom.

Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when we're mean or critical toward others, that energy tends to come back to hurt us in our relationships. Show them how kindness creates kindness in return, and how we should look at our own mistakes before pointing out what others do wrong.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is really doing something bad?"

Say: "You can still tell a trusted adult and get help. Jesus wants us to keep people safe. But He also wants us to check our own hearts first and speak with kindness instead of meanness."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone point out something you did wrong in a really mean way. Maybe they rolled their eyes, used a nasty tone, or said it in front of other people to embarrass you. Keep your hands up, look around. Almost everyone, right?

Now here's a harder question. Keep your hand up if when that happened, you felt like changing and doing better. Most hands are going down, aren't they? When someone is mean to us about our mistakes, it usually makes us feel defensive, angry, or hurt instead of wanting to improve.

But here's what gets really tricky. Sometimes the person pointing out our mistake is right! We really did mess up. We really could do better. But the way they said it made us not want to listen. Part of you thinks "They're probably right," but another part thinks "They didn't have to be so mean about it."

This is like in the movie *Inside Out* when Riley is struggling and her parents keep correcting her, but they're stressed and frustrated too. Everyone means well, but the way they're handling conflict makes everything worse instead of better.

The tricky part is figuring out how to help people do better without making them feel terrible. And it's even trickier when we realize that we mess up just as much as everyone else, but somehow it's easier to see their problems than our own.

Today we're going to hear about Jesus teaching on exactly this problem. He's going to tell us about logs and specks and mirrors and how the way we treat others tends to come right back to us. Let's find out what happened when Jesus taught about this.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to being criticized harshly and feeling defensive. Validate these feelings briefly but keep moving toward the story, they need to hear Jesus' wisdom about this pattern.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture this: Jesus is sitting on a mountainside with crowds of people gathered around Him. They've been listening to Him teach about how to live as God's people, and now He's about to tackle one of the biggest relationship problems they face.

In the crowd are people who love to point out what everyone else is doing wrong. You know the type, the ones who are quick to criticize, fast to find fault, always ready with a correction. They think they're helping, but somehow their "help" makes people feel worse, not better.

There are also people in the crowd who've been hurt by harsh criticism. They know what it feels like to have someone point out their mistakes in a mean way. They're tired of feeling like they can never do anything right.

And imagine how it feels to be in that crowd, knowing that you sometimes mess up just as much as anyone else, but it's so much easier to see what other people are doing wrong than to notice your own problems.

Jesus looks out at these people, all of us, really, and He's about to teach them something that will completely change how they think about pointing out mistakes and treating each other when someone messes up.

He says these words, and you can hear the authority and love in His voice: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

The people in the crowd look at each other. What does Jesus mean by "the measure you use"? He's talking about judgment like it's a mirror that reflects back at you.

Think about what that would be like. If you're harsh and mean when you point out someone's mistakes, that harshness tends to come back to you when you mess up. If you're kind and gentle when you help someone see their problems, that kindness tends to come back to you when you need grace.

But then Jesus tells them a story that makes everyone laugh and think at the same time. It's about wood and eyes and seeing clearly.

Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)

3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Can you picture this? Jesus is describing someone walking around with a huge wooden plank sticking out of their eye, but they're focused on a tiny speck of sawdust in someone else's eye. It would be completely ridiculous!

The person with the plank would be bumping into trees, knocking things over, unable to see where they're going. But somehow they think they can perform delicate eye surgery on someone else! Jesus calls this person a "hypocrite", someone who acts like they're better than they really are.

The amazing thing is that Jesus doesn't say "Never help anyone with their problems." He says "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." He wants us to help each other! But first we need to deal with our own big problems.

When we honest about our own mistakes and need for forgiveness, we can help others with kindness instead of meanness. We can speak truth with love instead of harshness because we remember what it feels like to need grace.

Then Jesus teaches them about God's heart toward all of us. He tells them that God is like the best parent ever, someone who gives good gifts to their children, who wants the best for us, who treats us with love even when we mess up.

And then He gives them the most important rule for relationships: "Do to others what you would have them do to you." When someone messes up, treat them the way you'd want to be treated when you mess up.

This changes everything! Instead of being quick to criticize and slow to forgive, we can be quick to understand and slow to judge harshly. Instead of pointing out every little mistake other people make, we can remember our own need for grace.

The people listening to Jesus realized that this wasn't just about being nicer. It was about creating a different kind of world, one where people help each other get better instead of just pointing out what's wrong. One where mercy creates more mercy, and kindness creates more kindness.

Sometimes in our lives, we're the person with the plank in our eye, thinking we can fix everyone else's problems. Sometimes we're the person getting criticized harshly for a small mistake. Jesus wants us to remember that we're all in need of grace.

What we learn is this: the way we treat others when they mess up comes back to affect how others treat us when we mess up. If we want kindness and patience when we fail, we need to give kindness and patience when others fail.

The core truth is that God loves us despite our mistakes, and He wants us to love others the same way. When we do this, we create relationships built on grace instead of judgment, help instead of harm.

Pause here. Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Mirror Effect

Imagine you have a friend who always points out your mistakes in a really harsh way, rolling their eyes, using a mean tone, sometimes embarrassing you in front of others. Then one day, this same friend makes a big mistake in front of you. How do you think you'd be tempted to respond?

Listen For: "Be mean back," "Point out their mistake," "Roll my eyes at them", affirm: "That makes total sense. When someone is harsh with us, it's hard not to be harsh back."

Question 2: The Plank Problem

Think about the person with the huge plank in their eye trying to take a tiny speck out of someone else's eye. Why would Jesus use such a silly, exaggerated picture? What point is He trying to make about how we see our own problems versus other people's problems?

If They Say: "It's funny" or "It's impossible", respond "Right! So why do we sometimes act like our problems are small but other people's problems are huge?"

Question 3: The Better Way

Jesus says once we take the plank out of our own eye, then we can see clearly to help our friend with their speck. What do you think would be different about how someone helps when they remember their own need for grace versus someone who thinks they never mess up?

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus wants us to be honest about our own mistakes first, it helps us be kind instead of mean when we help others."

Question 4: Creating Kindness

If the way we treat others comes back to us like a mirror, what kind of world would we create if everyone started treating mistakes with kindness and grace instead of harshness and criticism? What

would change in your friendships, family, or classroom?

If They Say: "Everyone would be nicer", ask "And how would that feel when you're the one who messes up?"

You're understanding something really important here. When we treat others' mistakes with grace, we create a world where our mistakes are treated with grace too. And when we remember our own need for forgiveness, we can help others improve without making them feel terrible about themselves.

4. Activity: Mirror Partners (8 minutes)

Zero Props Required , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

Purpose

This activity reinforces the mirror principle of judgment by having kids physically experience how the energy they send out comes back to them. Success looks like kids discovering that harsh, critical energy creates defensive responses, while gentle, helpful energy creates cooperation and trust.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Mirror Partners. Everyone find a partner and stand facing each other about arm's length apart. One person will be the Leader and one will be the Mirror. The Mirror's job is to copy exactly what the Leader does.

Here's the twist: Leaders, I'm going to give you different ways to lead. In Round 1, you'll lead by being demanding and critical, snap your fingers, roll your eyes if your Mirror doesn't copy perfectly, make frustrated faces when they mess up. In Round 2, you'll lead by being patient and encouraging, smile when they get it right, go slowly enough for them to follow, be gentle when they make mistakes.

Mirrors, just respond naturally to how your Leader treats you. If they're harsh, notice how that makes you feel. If they're kind, notice how that changes your experience. After each round, we'll switch roles.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Jesus' teaching about judgment, the energy we put out toward others comes back to affect how they respond to us and what kind of relationship we create.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round 1: Harsh Leadership. Leaders, be demanding and critical. Mirrors, just respond naturally to how you're being treated. Notice what happens to your willingness to cooperate when someone is harsh with your mistakes.

Stop! Switch roles. New leaders, be demanding and critical with your mirrors. Pay attention to how it feels to give and receive harsh energy when someone is trying to learn or follow you.

Round 2: Kind Leadership. Now leaders, be patient and encouraging. Go slowly, smile when your mirror gets it right, be gentle when they struggle. Mirrors, notice how differently you feel and respond when someone is kind about your mistakes.

Stop! Switch roles one more time. New leaders, be patient and kind. Notice how much more your mirror wants to cooperate and try hard when you're treating them with grace.

Freeze where you are! Look around the room. You can feel the difference, can't you? When we lead with kindness, people want to follow. When we criticize harshly, people want to resist or give up.

Watch For: The moment when harsh leadership creates resistance and defensive responses versus when kind leadership creates cooperation and trust, this is the physical representation of the judgment mirror principle.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when your partner was harsh versus when they were kind? The harsh energy made you want to resist or get defensive, didn't it? But the kind energy made you want to cooperate and keep trying. This is exactly what Jesus means about the measure we use coming back to us, harshness creates harshness, but kindness creates kindness.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: the way we treat others when they mess up tends to come back to us when we mess up. If we're harsh and critical, that harshness comes back to hurt us. But if we're kind and patient, that kindness comes back to help us.

This doesn't mean we never help people see their mistakes or that we just ignore problems. Jesus wants us to help each other get better! But first we need to remember our own mistakes and need for grace. Then we can help others with kindness instead of meanness.

The amazing result is that we create relationships where people actually want to improve and grow, instead of relationships where everyone is defensive and afraid of making mistakes. We get to help build a world where grace creates more grace.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you notice someone making a mistake, pause before you say anything and ask yourself: "How would I want someone to talk to me if I made this mistake?" Then treat them the way you'd want to be treated. See what happens!

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for being patient with us when we mess up. Help us remember our own mistakes when we see others struggling. Teach us to speak with kindness instead of harshness, and help us create friendships where everyone feels safe to grow and learn. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind to others instead of pointing out everything they do wrong.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
 - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
 - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
 - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
 - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
-

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare being critical to being a "mistake detective" always looking for problems, then ask "Would you rather play with a mistake detective or a kind friend?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness and love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God Is So Good." Use movements: point to others during "love one another" lyrics, hug yourself during "God loves me" parts, and make big welcoming gestures during "kindness" words.

Great singing! Now let's sit down for our story. Make a horseshoe shape on the floor facing me. Today we're going to hear about what Jesus taught about being kind to others instead of pointing out all their mistakes.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

Formation: Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound gentle when you're Jesus, sound frustrated when you're the critical person, sound happy when you talk about kindness.

Today we're going to meet Jesus when He taught people about being kind instead of being mean about mistakes.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Picture this: Jesus was sitting on a mountain with lots of people around Him. Some of the people liked to point out everything that was wrong with everyone else. They were like mistake detectives!

[Use a stern, critical voice and point your finger]

"You did that wrong! You messed up! You should have done it differently!" These people were always finding problems with others, but they never looked at their own mistakes.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to sad tone]

Other people in the crowd felt sad because someone had been mean to them about their mistakes. They knew what it was like when someone pointed out what they did wrong in a harsh way.

[Move to center, speak with warm, loving authority like Jesus]

Jesus looked at all these people and said something very important: "Do not judge others, or you will be judged too. The way you treat others will come back to treat you."

[Move to side, use excited storytelling voice]

Then Jesus told them the funniest story! He said, "Imagine someone walking around with a huge wooden board stuck in their eye, but they're trying to take a tiny piece of dust out of someone else's eye!"

Matthew 7:5 (NIV)

5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

[Pause and look around at each child, acting out someone with a plank in their eye]

Can you imagine that? Someone bumping into trees and walls because they have a big board in their eye, but they think they can help someone else see better? That's silly, isn't it? Yes!

[Move to center, speak with gentle wisdom]

Jesus was teaching that we all make mistakes. Instead of always pointing out other people's little problems, we should look at our own big problems first. Then we can help others with kindness.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Jesus taught them that God loves us even when we mess up. God is like the best parent who gives good gifts to their children. God wants us to treat others the same way He treats us, with love and kindness.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Then Jesus said, "Treat other people the way you want them to treat you." If you want others to be kind when you make mistakes, then be kind when they make mistakes.

[Speak with excitement]

This changes everything! Instead of being mistake detectives always looking for problems, we can be kindness helpers always looking for ways to love others!

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus taught that when we're kind to others, kindness comes back to us. When we're mean to others, meanness comes back to us. God wants us to choose kindness!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, we see someone do something wrong. Instead of being mean about it or pointing it out in a harsh way, we can choose to be helpful and kind. We can remember that we make mistakes too.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone makes a mistake, you can choose kindness. When someone needs help, you can choose to help gently. When you mess up, you can ask for help knowing that God loves you.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so much, and He wants you to share that love with others. You can be a kindness helper instead of a mistake detective!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Formation: Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question. You'll have about one minute to talk about it. Remember, there are no wrong answers!

Teacher Circulation: Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

Discussion Questions

Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.

1. How do you feel when someone is mean about your mistakes?
2. What's the difference between a mistake detective and a kindness helper?
3. Why do you think the person with the big board in their eye couldn't help others see?
4. What would you do if your friend made a mistake?
5. How does it feel when someone is kind about your mistakes?
6. What does it mean that God loves us even when we mess up?
7. How can you be a kindness helper at school?
8. What happens when we're mean to others?
9. What happens when we're kind to others?
10. Who is someone you know who is really kind?
11. Why does Jesus want us to look at our own mistakes first?
12. How can you treat others the way you want to be treated?
13. What would happen if everyone was a kindness helper?
14. How does God help us when we make mistakes?
15. What's one way you can show kindness this week?
16. How can you help someone without being mean about their mistake?
17. What did you learn about God's love today?

18. How can you remember to be kind when someone messes up?

19. What would change if we chose kindness instead of criticism?

20. How can you be like Jesus in the way you treat others?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in straight lines for our closing song. Who wants to share what they talked about?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select songs about kindness and love. Suggestions: "The Fruit of the Spirit" with hand motions for each fruit, "Love One Another" with hugging motions, or "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam" with bright, shining movements. Include specific movements like gentle hand gestures during "kindness" and open arms during "love."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Make rows and sit cross-legged with your hands folded. Let's talk to God about what we learned.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

Formation: Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

Dear God, thank you for loving us even when we make mistakes.

[Pause]

Help us choose to be kindness helpers instead of mistake detectives. When we see someone mess up, help us be gentle and kind.

[Pause]

Help us remember that we make mistakes too, and teach us to treat others the way we want to be treated.

[Pause]

Thank you for being the best God who gives us good gifts and loves us no matter what. Help us share your love with others. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about kindness. Examples: "Help me be kind to my sister" or "Thank you for loving me when I mess up."

Remember, you can choose to be a kindness helper this week! Look for ways to treat others the way you want to be treated. Have a wonderful week, and remember that God loves you so much!

When Stillness Wins

Trusting God's Justice, How do you wait when the wicked prosper?

Psalm 37:1-11

Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

The Passage

Psalm 37:1-11 (NIV)

1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. 3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous deeds shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil. 9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.

Context

Psalm 37 is a wisdom psalm attributed to David, written as an acrostic poem in Hebrew where each verse begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This literary structure suggests careful,

deliberate instruction rather than spontaneous prayer. The psalm addresses a universal human struggle: watching wicked people succeed while righteous people suffer or struggle. David speaks from experience, having faced Saul's persecution, political rivals, and corrupt leaders who seemed to prosper despite their evil actions.

The immediate context of verses 7-9 comes after David has already established the foundation: don't fret about evildoers, trust in God, do good, and take delight in the Lord. Now he addresses the specific emotional response when we witness wicked people actually succeeding in their schemes. This isn't theoretical, it's the gut-wrenching moment when corruption wins, bullies get promoted, and liars get ahead. David knows this feeling intimately and speaks directly to it.

The Big Idea

The response to wicked people's success is stillness, patience, and refrained anger, not agitation or counter-scheming. Trust in eventual divine justice enables present non-retaliation.

This isn't passive resignation but active trust that requires tremendous internal discipline. David acknowledges that fretting leads to evil because obsession with others' wickedness can corrupt the very person disturbed by it. The psalm operates with this-worldly expectations that don't always match our experience, requiring us to navigate apparent contradictions between divine justice and visible reality.

Theological Core

- **Stillness before wickedness.** When evil prospers, our first response should be intentional stillness before God, not immediate action or reaction driven by emotion.
 - **Fretting as spiritually dangerous.** Obsessive concern about others' wickedness has the power to corrupt us, making us become like those whose actions disturb us.
 - **Trust enabling patience.** Confidence in God's ultimate justice allows us to wait without taking matters into our own hands or compromising our integrity.
 - **Divine justice operates on God's timeline.** God's vindication of the righteous and judgment of the wicked may not align with human expectations for speed or visibility.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Fretting about injustice can corrupt our character and make us act like those we oppose
 - God's justice timeline doesn't always match human expectations, requiring mature faith
 - Stillness before God is an active spiritual discipline, not passive resignation
 - Wisdom involves discerning when to act and when to wait, trusting God's sovereignty
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Grades 4, 6

- Getting really upset about unfair situations can make us do wrong things too
 - We can choose to be still and trust God instead of getting angry and plotting revenge
 - Bad choices eventually have bad consequences, even if we don't see them right away
 - Feeling angry about unfairness is normal, but we can choose what to do with that feeling
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Grades 1, 3

- God sees everything, even when bad people seem to win
 - God will make things right in His time
 - We can trust God and be peaceful instead of getting really mad
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying divine justice.** Don't promise that visible earthly justice always happens quickly or obviously. The psalm's "inherit the land" language points to ultimate rather than immediate vindication.
 - **Dismissing righteous anger.** Acknowledge that anger about injustice can be appropriate and even godly, but distinguish between righteous anger and the fretting that leads to evil.
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- **Promoting passive fatalism.** "Be still" doesn't mean never taking appropriate action against injustice, but rather acting from trust in God rather than from fretting and anger.
 - **Ignoring the reality of suffering.** Don't minimize the real pain of watching wickedness prosper or suggest that trusting God means not feeling disturbed by injustice.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if the wicked people never get punished in this life?"

That's a really honest question that even David wrestled with. The psalm talks about "inheriting the land," which sometimes happens in ways we can see and sometimes in ways we can't. God's justice is bigger than just this life, and sometimes what looks like getting away with evil actually isn't, we just can't see the full picture. The key is trusting that God sees everything and will ultimately make all things right, even when we can't see how.

"Isn't it wrong to just do nothing when bad things happen?"

Great question! "Be still" doesn't mean become a doormat or never stand up for what's right. It means don't let anger and fretting drive your decisions. When we're really upset about injustice, we might do things that actually make us more like the people we're upset about. Stillness before God helps us act from wisdom and trust rather than from anger and revenge. Sometimes God calls us to act against injustice, but He wants us to do it His way.

"How long is 'wait patiently' supposed to be?"

The psalm doesn't give us a timeline because God's timing isn't our timing. David says "a little while" but then lived through years of running from Saul. The waiting is less about the clock and more about the heart attitude. Patience means continuing to trust God and do right even when justice takes longer than we want. It's one of the hardest parts of faith, and it's okay to struggle with it while still choosing to trust.

The One Thing to Remember

When wickedness prospers, stillness and trust prevent us from becoming what we oppose, trusting that God's justice operates on His timeline, not ours.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to explore how fretting about others' wickedness can corrupt our own character, and help them wrestle with the tension between trusting God's justice and the reality that visible justice doesn't always come when we expect it.

The Tension to Frame

How do you wait for justice when the wicked keep winning? How long should trust and patience last when evil seems to prosper indefinitely?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of injustice and frustration, these feelings are normal and even appropriate
 - Honor the complexity of God's justice timeline without giving easy answers about why bad things happen
 - Let students wrestle with the tension rather than rushing to resolve it with simple solutions
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You work incredibly hard on a project, follow all the rules, cite your sources properly, and get a B+. Meanwhile, the person sitting next to you plagiarizes half their work, lies to the teacher about technical problems, and somehow gets an A. Not only do they get away with it, but they're bragging about how easy it was to fool everyone.

Your first instinct is probably anger, and honestly, that makes total sense. It's infuriating to watch dishonesty get rewarded while integrity gets overlooked. Part of you wants to expose them, part of you wants to cheat too since honesty obviously doesn't pay, and part of you just wants to scream about how unfair everything is.

Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were life and death. King David watched corrupt leaders prosper, violent people gain power, and dishonest people succeed again and again. But what he discovered about his own heart during these experiences might surprise you.

As we read, pay attention to what David says causes the real damage when wicked people succeed. It's not what you might expect. Also notice what he suggests as an alternative to the anger and fretting that feels so natural and justified.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 37 and let's read verses 1-11 silently first.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Some students may need help with words like "vindication" or "meek." Let them sit with the apparent contradiction between God's promises and their experiences. Don't rush to explain, let the tension build.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does David tell people to avoid when facing wicked success?
 - What reasons does he give for these commands, why avoid fretting and anger?
 - What promises does he make about how things will eventually turn out?
 - How does this match or not match what you've observed in real life?
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Psalm 37:1-11 (NIV)

1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. 3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you

the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous deeds shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil. 9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the emotional weight of this passage.

Reader 1: Verses 1-3 (The initial commands) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-6 (The promises for those who trust) **Reader 3:** Verses 7-9 (The core passage on stillness and fretting) **Reader 4:** Verses 10-11 (The ultimate vindication)

Listen for the emotional tone here. This isn't just advice, David is speaking to people who are genuinely angry and frustrated about injustice.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What seemed hardest to believe?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you already know the answer to, but things you're actually curious about or that seem difficult or confusing. Maybe something that doesn't match your experience, or something that seems really hard to do. You have 3 minutes to discuss and settle on your best questions.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Honor their struggles with these difficult concepts.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around justice timing, the reality of David's promises, and practical application. Start with questions most students will relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence does David give that the wicked will actually be destroyed?"
 - "What does David mean when he says fretting 'leads only to evil', what kind of evil?"
 - "What's the difference between being angry about injustice and fretting about it?"
 - "How do you reconcile 'a little while' with situations where justice takes years or decades?"
 - "What does 'be still before the Lord' actually look like in practice when you're really angry?"
 - "When might God want us to take action against injustice versus wait patiently?"
 - "What would happen if everyone followed this advice, would evil just run unchecked?"
 - "Why does trusting God's timing matter more than getting justice on our timeline?"
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Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? David isn't just worried about external injustice, he's concerned about internal corruption. He says fretting leads to evil, meaning obsessing over others' wickedness can actually make us more like them. The real battle isn't just out there with the corrupt people; it's in here with our own hearts. Stillness isn't passive, it's an active choice to trust God's justice rather than take it into our own hands.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about school, social media, family situations, current events, or even global issues. Where do you watch people get away with things that make you angry, and where do you feel that fretting starting to change how you

think or act?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Teachers who obviously play favorites while claiming to treat everyone fairly
 - Family situations where one person gets away with behavior that would get others in trouble
 - Social media influencers who build platforms on lies and manipulation
 - Friends who betray trust but somehow maintain their social status
 - Political leaders or public figures who seem immune to consequences for their actions
 - Workplace or school situations where cheating and dishonesty are rewarded
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations call for action, others for waiting. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about when to act versus when to be still.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen fretting about injustice actually change someone for the worse?"
 - "What would help you choose stillness and trust when everything in you wants immediate justice?"
 - "How do you discern when God wants you to take action versus wait patiently?"
 - "What's the difference between trusting God's justice and just giving up on justice altogether?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you. When wickedness prospers, the greatest danger isn't that evil people get ahead, it's that fretting about their success might corrupt your own heart. David learned that obsessing over others' corruption can make us more like them. Stillness before God isn't passive resignation; it's active trust that prevents us from becoming what we oppose.

This week, pay attention to your internal response when you encounter injustice. Notice the difference between appropriate anger that motivates godly action and fretting that starts to poison your thoughts

and attitudes. Experiment with what "be still before the Lord" might look like for you, maybe it's prayer, maybe it's deliberately choosing not to rehearse grievances, maybe it's trusting God's timeline instead of demanding your own.

You did some serious thinking today about really difficult questions. Keep wrestling with these ideas, God honors the struggle to understand His ways, even when His timeline doesn't match ours. Your desire for justice reflects God's heart; learning to trust His timing deepens your faith.

Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that getting really angry about unfair situations can make us do wrong things too, and that we can choose to trust God instead of letting anger control our choices.

If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God stop bad people right away?"

Say: "That's a great question. God sees everything, and He will make things right. Sometimes it takes longer than we want because God knows things we don't know. The most important thing is that we don't let anger make us do wrong things while we wait."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in line for something, maybe lunch, maybe a ride at an amusement park, maybe to get into an assembly, and someone cut in front of you. Keep your hands up if the person who cut didn't get in trouble, and maybe even got to the front before you did.

Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if that made you so mad that you started thinking about cutting in line too, or getting them back somehow, or just doing something you knew wasn't right because you were so frustrated. It's okay to be honest, sometimes when people are unfair to us, we want to be unfair right back.

I totally get that feeling. When someone does something wrong and nothing bad happens to them, part of us thinks, "Well, if they can get away with it, why can't I?" It's like when everyone around you is breaking a rule and never getting caught, so you start wondering if you should break the rule too.

This reminds me of the movie Finding Nemo, when Marlin watches all these fish swimming through the dangerous jellyfish and nothing bad happens to them, so he thinks maybe it's safe. But just because someone else gets away with something dangerous doesn't mean it's actually safe, sometimes the consequences just come later.

The tricky part is figuring out how to handle it when you see people doing wrong things and seeming to win because of it. How do you stay good when being good feels like it's not working? How do you not let their bad choices turn into your bad choices?

Today we're going to hear about King David, who watched a lot of really bad people succeed and get ahead by doing terrible things. He figured out something important about what happens inside our hearts when we get too focused on other people's wickedness. Let's find out what he learned.

What to Expect: Kids will likely share stories about unfairness at school, with siblings, or in sports.

Acknowledge these briefly with "That sounds really frustrating" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

King David had seen a lot of unfair things in his life. He had watched his boss, King Saul, try to kill him even though David had done nothing wrong. He had seen dishonest people get promoted to important jobs while honest people got ignored or punished.

David had seen bullies become powerful leaders, liars become trusted advisors, and greedy people become wealthy and respected. And the worst part was that many of these people were actually succeeding because they were doing wrong things, lying helped them get ahead, stealing made them rich, and hurting others made them feared and powerful.

One day, David was feeling really frustrated about all this unfairness. His heart was burning with anger, and his mind kept going over and over all the ways these wicked people were winning. He couldn't stop thinking about it, couldn't stop feeling mad about it, couldn't stop wanting to get back at them somehow.

Imagine feeling like that, like your brain is stuck on replay, showing you all the unfair things over and over again. Your stomach feels tight, your hands clench into fists, and you start planning ways to get even or thinking maybe you should just start acting like them since being good doesn't seem to pay off.

But then David realized something important was happening inside his own heart. All that anger and worry about wicked people was starting to change him. He was becoming more like the people he was mad at, angrier, more suspicious, more willing to think about doing wrong things himself.

That's when David sat down and wrote this psalm. It was like he was talking to himself and to God and to anyone else who felt the same way. He wanted to share what he had learned about dealing with unfairness without letting it ruin your own heart.

David said to his heart and to anyone listening: "Stop fretting about evil people. Stop letting yourself get all worked up about them." He knew that word "fret" meant more than just being a little annoyed, it meant obsessing, worrying, letting it eat you up inside.

Then David said something really wise. He said the reason to stop fretting wasn't just because it felt bad, but because fretting about evil people can actually make you do evil things too. When we spend too much time thinking about how unfair people are, we can start acting unfair ourselves.

David had noticed this pattern: when people get really upset about others doing wrong, they sometimes start doing wrong themselves. They might lie to get back at liars, or cheat to beat the cheaters, or become mean to fight the mean people.

So what was David's solution? He said: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." Instead of getting all worked up and plotting and scheming, David chose to be calm and trust that God sees everything and will make things right when the time is right.

Psalm 37:7-8 (NIV)

7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil.

David was saying that when we see people doing wrong and getting away with it, we have a choice. We can let ourselves get all angry and upset and start planning how to get them back, or we can choose to

be still and trust God to handle it in His time and His way.

This doesn't mean David didn't care about fairness, he cared a lot! But he learned that getting all worked up about unfairness often made him think about doing unfair things himself. It was like the badness was contagious, and the best way to not catch it was to focus on God instead of focusing on the bad people.

Then David made a promise about what would eventually happen. He said that people who do evil will eventually face consequences for their choices, and people who trust God and do right will eventually see good results from their choices. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but eventually.

Psalm 37:9 (NIV)

9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

David discovered something amazing: when he chose to be still and trust God instead of fretting and getting angry, he felt peaceful inside. He could focus on doing right instead of spending all his energy thinking about what was wrong. He could be the kind of person God wanted him to be instead of becoming more like the people who made him angry.

Sometimes in our lives, we see kids at school who cheat and get good grades, or people who lie and seem to get what they want, or bullies who seem powerful and popular. David's wisdom tells us that getting really upset about these people can actually make us start acting like them.

Instead, we can choose to be still, to stay calm, to trust that God sees everything, and to keep doing right even when doing right seems harder than doing wrong. We can choose to let God handle the unfairness while we focus on being the kind of people He wants us to be.

What David learned is that the best way to fight against evil is to stay good, to stay peaceful, and to trust that God is bigger than any unfairness we see. When we do that, we don't become like the people we're upset about, we become more like the people God wants us to be.

Pause here. Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Angry Feelings

Think about a time when someone at school or in your family did something really unfair and didn't get in trouble for it. Maybe they blamed you for something they did, or maybe they took credit for your work, or maybe they broke something and let someone else get blamed. How did that make you feel inside, and what did you want to do about it?

Listen For: "Mad," "Wanted to get them back," "Felt like doing something bad too", affirm: "That makes total sense. When people are unfair to us, our hearts want fairness really badly."

Question 2: The Temptation

David noticed that when he spent a lot of time thinking about evil people and getting angry about them, he started wanting to do wrong things himself. Have you ever noticed that happening? Like when someone is mean to you, you start wanting to be mean back? Or when someone cheats and gets away with it, you start thinking maybe you should cheat too?

If They Say: "I wanted to be mean back" or "I thought about cheating too", respond: "You're being really honest. That's exactly what David noticed happening in his own heart."

Question 3: The Hard Choice

David said the solution was to "be still before the Lord" instead of fretting and getting all worked up. What do you think that looks like for kids your age? When you're really mad about something unfair, how can you choose to be still and trust God instead of letting the anger make you do something wrong?

Connect: "Those are great ideas. This is exactly what made David's choice so hard and so important, choosing to trust God when everything in you wants to fight back."

Question 4: The Long Wait

David promised that evil people will eventually face consequences and good people will eventually see good results. But sometimes that takes a really long time. How do you keep choosing to do right when it seems like wrong is winning and it might take a long time for things to change?

If They Say: "It's too hard to wait" or "I want fairness now", acknowledge: "Waiting for fairness is one of the hardest things about trusting God. David felt that way too, but he learned that God's timing is worth waiting for."

You guys are thinking really deeply about this. David learned that the best way to fight against evil is not to become evil ourselves. When we choose to be still and trust God, we stay good inside even when the world around us isn't being fair. Now let's try an activity that shows us what this looks like.

4. Activity: The Steady Tower (8 minutes)

Zero Props Required , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

Purpose

This activity reinforces the principle that staying steady and still when others are chaotic prevents us from falling down ourselves. Kids will physically experience how fretting (represented by movement and agitation) makes them unstable, while stillness keeps them strong. Success looks like kids discovering that they can stay steady even when others around them are being disruptive.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play something called "The Steady Tower." Half of you will be "steady towers", you'll stand perfectly still with your feet planted and your arms at your sides. The other half will be "chaos makers", you'll move around the steady towers trying to distract them and make them move or lose their balance.

Here's the challenge: Steady towers, your job is to stay perfectly calm and still no matter what the chaos makers do around you. Chaos makers, you can dance, make faces, tell jokes, wave your hands, anything to try to get the steady towers to move or react. But no touching!

The twist is this: after two minutes, anyone who moved or got distracted has to sit down. Then we'll see what happens when there are fewer steady towers and the chaos gets more intense. The goal is to see who can stay steady even when everything around them is chaotic.

We're doing this because it's exactly like David's situation, when there's chaos and unfairness all around you, can you choose to be still and steady instead of getting caught up in the chaos?

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start the first round with about half as steady towers and half as chaos makers. Let it run for 2 minutes. You'll see some towers start to smile, giggle, or move slightly as they get distracted by the chaos around them.

Watch for the moment when steady towers start to get drawn into the chaos, when they begin to smile, respond to the jokes, or start moving. Some will maintain perfect stillness while chaos swirls around them. Others will gradually get pulled into the energy around them.

Call out encouragement: "Steady towers, remember your job is to stay still no matter what happens around you. Chaos makers, you're doing great at creating distractions!" Help them see the parallel as it's happening: "Notice how hard it is to stay calm when everyone around you is being crazy!"

After two minutes, have anyone who moved or lost their stillness sit down. Then restart with fewer steady towers and the same number of chaos makers, making the challenge harder. This time the steady towers should find it even more difficult to maintain their calm.

Watch for the moment when steady towers realize they have the power to choose stillness even when chaos increases around them. Some will discover they can be peaceful even in the midst of craziness. Celebrate when you see someone maintaining perfect stillness despite escalating chaos.

Watch For: The moment when a steady tower chooses to remain calm despite intense distraction around them, this is the physical representation of David's choice to be still before God rather than fret about wicked people's success.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you chose to stay steady versus when you got caught up in the chaos around you? Steady towers, was it harder to stay calm when there was more chaos around you? This is exactly what David experienced, when there's wickedness and unfairness all around, we can choose to be steady and trust God, or we can get caught up in the chaos and start acting chaotic ourselves. Staying still gave you power that getting distracted took away.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today from King David's wisdom. When we see people doing wrong things and getting away with it, getting really angry and upset can actually make us start doing wrong things too.

The anger and fretting is contagious, it can spread from them to us and make us more like the people we're mad at.

This doesn't mean we should never care about fairness or never feel upset when people do wrong. Those feelings are normal and even good. But David learned that when we spend too much time obsessing about evil people, we can start becoming more evil ourselves.

The amazing result when we choose to be still and trust God is that we get to stay good inside, we feel more peaceful, and we can focus our energy on doing right instead of getting back at people who do wrong. We don't let their bad choices turn into our bad choices.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you see someone doing something unfair or getting away with something they shouldn't, try David's approach. Instead of spending a lot of time thinking about how unfair they are or planning how to get them back, choose to be still for a minute and trust that God sees what happened. Then focus your energy on making a good choice yourself.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for David's wisdom about staying good even when others around us are doing wrong. Help us choose to be still and trust you when we see unfair things happening. Give us strength to keep doing right even when doing wrong seems easier. Help us not let other people's bad choices turn into our bad choices. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God sees everything and will make things right, so we don't need to get angry when bad people seem to win.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle

- **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher

- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other

- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines

- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God's big plan to a parent who sees everything in the house, kids can't hide from Mom or Dad forever, and God sees even more than parents do.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about trusting God or God's love. Suggestions: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," "God is So Good," or "Trust and Obey." Use movements: hands cupped during "whole world," pointing up during "God," and marching in place during "trust."

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape on the floor. Today we're going to hear about a king who learned something very important about what to do when we see bad people doing bad things. Are you ready to listen?

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

Formation: Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when talking about unfairness, sound peaceful when talking about God's plan.

Today we're going to meet King David, and he had a big problem that made him very upset.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, make a confused face]

David was looking around his kingdom, and he saw some very bad people doing very bad things. They were lying and stealing and being mean to good people. And you know what? Nothing bad was happening to them! They were getting richer and more powerful!

[Use an upset voice, furrow your brow]

This made David feel really angry and confused. He thought, "Why are these bad people getting good things? Why aren't they getting in trouble? This isn't fair!" His heart felt hot and angry, and his hands turned into fists.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to worried]

David started thinking about those bad people all the time. He would wake up thinking about them. He would eat breakfast thinking about them. He would go to bed thinking about them. It was like his brain was stuck!

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

But then God helped David understand something very important. God said, "David, when you spend all your time thinking about bad people and getting angry about them, something dangerous happens to your heart."

[Move to side, speak directly to children]

God showed David that when we get really, really angry about bad people, we can start acting bad ourselves! It's like their badness can spread to us if we're not careful.

Psalm 37:8 (NIV)

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think David was surprised to learn that getting angry about bad people could make him bad too? Yes! He thought his anger was helping, but God showed him it was actually hurting his heart.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

So God gave David a much better idea. Instead of getting all angry and upset, God said, "David, be still. Be quiet. Trust me. I see everything those bad people are doing, and I will take care of it when the time is right."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, speak calmly]

God told David, "When you see bad people doing bad things, don't let it make you angry for a long time. Don't let it change your heart. Instead, be peaceful and remember that I am God and I see everything."

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

David decided to trust God. Instead of staying angry, he chose to be still and peaceful. Instead of thinking about bad people all day, he chose to think about God's love and goodness.

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what happened? David felt much better! His heart wasn't angry anymore. He could sleep better. He could focus on doing good things instead of worrying about bad people. He felt peaceful and happy again!

[Pause dramatically]

God taught David that He has a big plan, and in His plan, people who do bad things will eventually get consequences, and people who trust God and do good things will eventually get good results. God can see the whole picture, even when we can't.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we see kids being mean and not getting in trouble, or we see people taking things that don't belong to them, or we see someone lying and seeming to get away with it. David learned that God sees all of this, and God will handle it.

[Move closer to the children]

When bad things happen around you, you can choose to be still and trust God instead of getting really angry. You can choose to keep doing good things instead of thinking about bad people all the time.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you, and He sees everything that happens to you. You can trust Him to make things right, and you can focus on keeping your heart good and peaceful. That's much better than staying angry!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Formation: Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

Teacher Circulation: Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

Discussion Questions

Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.

1. How do you think David felt when he saw bad people getting good things?
 2. Have you ever seen someone do something mean and not get in trouble?
 3. What do you think it means to "be still" when you're angry?
 4. What would you do if someone took your toy and didn't give it back?
 5. How did David's feelings change when he chose to trust God?
 6. Why do you think God sees everything that happens?
 7. What good things can you do when you feel angry about something unfair?
 8. How can you remember that God will take care of bad people?
 9. What makes you feel peaceful when you're upset?
 10. How do you think God feels when He sees bad things happen?
 11. What's the difference between being angry for a little bit and staying angry for a long time?
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12. How can you choose to do good things even when others do bad things?

13. What do you think God wants you to remember when someone is mean to you?

14. How do you trust someone when you can't see them helping right away?

15. What brave things can you do when you feel scared or angry?

16. What did you learn about God from David's story?

17. What do you want to remember from this story?

18. How can you pray when you see unfair things happen?

19. What would happen if everyone chose to be still and trust God?

20. How can you be like David when someone makes you angry?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about peace or trusting God. Suggestions: "Peace Like a River," "Jesus Loves Me," or "God Will Take Care of You." Include movements like swaying gently side to side for peace songs, or pointing to themselves for "loves me."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Cross your legs, fold your hands, and bow your heads.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

Formation: Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

Dear God, thank you for teaching David about trusting you when bad things happen.

[Pause]

Help us remember that you see everything, even when we can't see you working. When we feel angry about unfair things, help us choose to be still and peaceful like David did.

[Pause]

Help us keep doing good things even when other people do bad things. Thank you for loving us and taking care of us always.

[Pause]

Thank you for being so powerful and good and for having a plan to make everything right. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about trusting God. Examples: "Thank you God for seeing everything" or "Help me be still when I'm angry."

Remember what David learned, God sees everything and will make things right. When you see unfair things this week, you can choose to be still and trust God like David did. Have a wonderful week, and remember that God loves you so much!
